

THE MOTHER
by Lynne Conner
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Cast of Characters

The Mother After (Jill Curtis): older

The Mother Before (Jill Curtis): younger

The Son (John Curtis): various ages

The Father (Michael Curtis)

Chorus 1:

- The Anchor (Jessica Bakker-Shaw)
- Sandy (Brendan's Mother)

Chorus 2:

- Announcer
- Reporter (in Los Angeles and at elementary school shooting, called Chris McFarland)
- Brendan
- Brendan's Father
- Bad Mom's Hall of Fame Host

Chorus 3:

- Dr. Burkhalter (Psychologist)
- Attorney (Lee Andrews)

Time and Place

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The last five years.

Settings

Multiple settings as referenced in the text. These environments can be established with small visual references (a park bench) or other inventive forms of contemporary design—please avoid full-blown realism.

Reader's Key

⇒ [/] indicates that the speaker is being spoken over by the following speaker's line.

- ⇒ [. . .] indicates that the speaker drifts off.
- ⇒ [*Pause*] indicates that the speaker is reflecting.
- ⇒ [*Silence*] indicates that the momentum of the dialogue has been disrupted.
- ⇒ Character names following other character names without dialogue in between indicate that the characters involved are communicating/reacting to each other without words.

Scene 1 - Flash

THE SON

I'll start by saying hi. John Curtis here.

Scene 2 - Flash

THE FATHER

(crying and moaning)

No, no, no

Scene 3 - Playground in Starlight: 1

Playground. Starlight.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(holding a large mail basket, filled with envelopes, pulls one out, opens it and begins reading)

There but for the grace of God go I.

THE MOTHER AFTER

(pulls out another letter, opens, reads)

A mother is supposed to know.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(pulls out another letter, opens, reads)

We are lifting you up.

THE MOTHER AFTER

(pulls out another letter, opens, reads)

When you're a good parent you just sort of know what your kids are up to.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(pulls out another letter, opens, reads)

I have forgiven you and only wish you the best.

THE MOTHER AFTER

(pulls out another letter, opens, reads)

Did you ever try a good old-fashioned spanking or two?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(pulls out another letter, opens, reads)

I know that if it had been one of my sons who did this I would be absolutely shattered. Not that it could ever be one of them as there must have been signs.

THE MOTHER AFTER

(pulls out another letter, opens, reads)

I am a parent and I know there is so much more that could have been done.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(pulls out another letter, opens, reads)

You've created your own special version of hell. Hope you enjoy living in it.

THE MOTHER AFTER

(pulls out another letter, opens)

Where WERE you, Mother?

Drops letter to the floor.

Scene 4 - A Killer in the Family: 1

Television studio.

NBC ANNOUNCER

You are watching "A Killer in the Family," an NBC special report.

THE ANCHOR

Welcome. Our program tonight takes a rare in-depth look into the phenomenon of school shooters from the perspective of what some call the least understood victims: the killer's parents. "What did the parents do wrong?" is a phrase we often hear in the media and in our own homes. Over the course of the next hour we'll try to find some answers. We have background reports from the team. We'll speak with a specialist in forensic psychology and learn more about how investigators come to understand the inner minds of school shooters. But most importantly, in an NBC exclusive, we'll have the opportunity to interview the mother of John Curtis, the school shooter who five years ago took the lives of 17 people at Kennedy High School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania before killing himself.

First let's turn to Chris McFarland, reporting tonight from Los Angeles. Chris, you have some data to share on public attitudes toward the parents of mass murderers?

REPORTER

Yes, Jessica. From Columbine to Parkland*, newspaper surveys reveal that between 80 to 83 percent of respondents blame the events on the parents' failure to teach their children proper values. At the same time, the families of killers report feeling powerless, knowing they have to

live with these crimes for the rest of their lives. As one police chief puts it, “They are doing a life sentence of their own.”

**place references should be updated to reflect the most recent school shootings*

THE ANCHOR

Thanks Chris. Now we turn to Dr. Morgan Burkhauler, a forensic psychologist who has worked on a number of school shooting incidents. Dr. Burkhauler, I want to begin by asking you to explain what a forensic psychologist does?

DR. BURKHAULER

I conduct forensic examinations of mass murderers who are deceased.

THE ANCHOR

You examine them through their past actions and the records they leave behind.

DR. BURKHAULER

Exactly. And sometimes I also perform court ordered examinations of individuals who have been accused and are under prosecution.

THE ANCHOR

You have appeared as both a state and defense witness in several high profile cases, including Elliot Rodger. Correct?

DR. BURKHAULER

Yes. I worked on the Rodger case.

THE ANCHOR

His phone video diatribe is utterly chilling. (*shutters theatrically*) Not to mention Eric Harris’ notebook, Nicholas Cruz’ Instagram, John Curtis’ vlog/

DR. BURKHAULER

Those manifestos reveal/

THE ANCHOR

I’m sure we could go on and on about them, doctor, but let’s get right to the question that’s on all of our viewers’ minds this evening: With this kind of material directly in their faces, how could these parents not have known?

DR. BURKHAULER

Yes. Well. One of the studies I cite in my recent book shows that these parents are usually quite blind to what is happening with their sons. They really do not know what is going on internally, in their heads. In fact, what we’ve discovered/

THE ANCHOR

Wait, wait a minute. Isn't that our job, as parents, to find out what our kids are thinking? That's job number one, isn't it?

DR. BURKHAULTER

We tend to think that way, yes. But what our study reveals is that many of these parents, no matter how active they are in their children's lives, are not being shown the side of their child that turns out to be a killer.

THE ANCHOR

Hmm. It's pretty hard to believe that something could be *that* wrong and we, as parents, wouldn't know it. Depression alone has many outward signs, doesn't it?

DR. BURKHAULTER

Sometimes yes. But sometimes the answer is, no, there aren't any notable outward signs.

THE ANCHOR

Really?

DR. BURKHAULTER

Look, I have to caution your viewers against judging these parents too harshly. Young men like this are often very adept at showing only a limited side of their character to adults.

THE ANCHOR

Most parents would say to you: I know what my kid's up to.

DR. BURKHAULTER

(pause)

You don't.

THE ANCHOR

So what you're saying is that it's not the family's fault?

DR. BURKHAULTER

The vast majority of school shooters come from relatively stable family environments, with what most of us would label loving parents.

THE ANCHOR

I'd like to read something from a newspaper editorial published a few days after the Adam Lanza murders. "We can't blame lax gun-control laws, access to mental health treatment, prescription drugs or video games for Lanza's terrible killing spree. *We can* point to yet another mother who should have been more aware of how sick her son had become and forced treatment."

DR. BURKHAULTER

Forcing treatment is not the same as receiving treatment.

THE ANCHOR

Okay, yes, sure it's true I suppose that you can't force teenagers to always cooperate. But in so many of these cases/

DR. BURKHAULTER

What I'm trying to say/

THE ANCHOR

I mean, c'mon. These are middle, upper middle-class kids! With ready access to school counselors and private therapists. Where were all those resources when they were locked in their bedrooms planning mass murder?

DR. BURKHAULTER

As I said, you can't force treatment. Ultimately, it's the patient's decision.

THE ANCHOR

Another aspect that many people wonder about is the issue of loyalty. In your recent book you write about the biological aspects of parenting, so let me ask you: Are there limits to parental love? Or is it by its very nature unconditional?

DR. BURKHAULTER

In any functional family bond there will be strong psychological and emotional incentives to defend and remain loyal to the family member/

THE ANCHOR

Blood is thicker than water?

DR. BURKHAULTER

Actually, it goes beyond just a sentiment: we have strong biological evidence that people are hardwired to defend their kin. This explains why we will often delude ourselves about the reality of our blood relative's guilt or innocence.

THE ANCHOR

Fascinating. Thank you, Dr. Burkhauler. *(turning to camera)* When we return, in an NBC exclusive, the first on-air interview with Jill Curtis, whose son John Curtis was responsible for the massacre at Kennedy High School in Pittsburgh five years ago.

Scene 5 - Thanatos Diaries: 1

Alone somewhere. Recording on his phone camera.

THE SON

So. Uhm. Okay. *(deep breath)* Welcome, uhm, to the Thanatos Diaries. Episode one. *(pause, breathing hard)* Shit. *(pause)* I'm, uh, more nervous than I thought I'd be. *(deep breath)*. Okay. Okay. Gonna channel my mother here. *(phony smile)* Lecture time! *(straightens up)* So. In Greek mythology, Thanatos was, like, the demon personification of death? In Roman mythology the character name is Mors, god of the underworld. Also known—and this is fascinating—as the

punisher of broken oaths. The urge to personify Death is not, like, a Greek thing, or a Roman thing. It's a human thing, found in every culture. A psychological trick. A way of pretending to ward off the inevitable, which is really just finding a mechanism for coping with it. You know?

(sitting down, moving phone camera lens to a different, more casual angle)

So. Anyway. What I really want to talk about today is the death drive, which takes us back to the term "Thanatos" and introduces Sigmund Freud. I know, I know. It's not cool to quote Freud. But please hang with me here. The thing *I* appreciate about Freud is that *he* understands the value of a good battle story. He could have been like a really successful game designer or a show runner or something. You know? 'Cause he's always got one force battling it out with another and it always ends with either sex or death. With his Thanatos theory, he's basically pitting Eros, the life force, against Ego, the death force.

So, like, who's going win that battle? *(smirking)* Stay tuned.

Scene 6 - After: 1

A hotel room.

THE MOTHER AFTER

C'mon, Lee. You must understand how hard this is for us.

ATTORNEY

It's a question of your safety, Jill.

THE MOTHER AFTER

I need to be in my/

THE FATHER

Lee, listen to me. Three weeks in a hotel is a long/

ATTORNEY

Just a little bit longer/

THE MOTHER AFTER

I need to/

THE FATHER

The house could get vandalized./ For all I know it already has been.

ATTORNEY

The Shadyside police are patrolling regularly.

THE FATHER

Is that graffiti still there?

ATTORNEY

Your neighbors scrubbed it off.

THE FATHER

(mumbling)

To make room for more.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Lee, surely you understand, we need to be in our home.

ATTORNEY

Another week or two. Let me get some safety nets in place first.

THE MOTHER AFTER

I need to get the mail. We have bills to pay, and there might be/

ATTORNEY

I'll have someone from my office separate out the bills.

THE MOTHER AFTER

You have our mail?

ATTORNEY

The police have it.

Pause.

THE MOTHER AFTER

What did you mean by separate out?

THE FATHER

(to Jill)

From the hate mail.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Oh.

ATTORNEY

You don't need to see that.

THE MOTHER AFTER

See what exactly?

ATTORNEY

Jill, you don't want/

THE FATHER

Must be pretty bad/

THE MOTHER AFTER

See what, Lee?

ATTORNEY

The mail you're getting, it's mostly post-cards and letters asking . . .

THE MOTHER AFTER

Asking?

ATTORNEY

I don't know. People trying to figure it out I guess?

THE MOTHER AFTER

Figure it out?

ATTORNEY

Something like this, it, it, disrupts. It. Unbalances.

THE FATHER

And they think they can figure it out by writing to us?

ATTORNEY

The investigators say it's a kind of rubber-necking.

THE MOTHER AFTER

And we're the car crash.

ATTORNEY

Yes.

THE FATHER

THE MOTHER AFTER

THE FATHER

THE MOTHER AFTER

(to The Father)

Michael. Jean called and said that some of the other neighbors have been dropping off casseroles. She's been taking them off the porch and putting them in her freezer for us.

ATTORNEY

Tell her to throw it all away.

THE FATHER

What?

THE MOTHER AFTER

Food from our friends?

ATTORNEY

You need to tell her to throw it away. I'm sorry. But I have to stress this.

THE FATHER

Are you kidding me? People we've known for twenty years?

ATTORNEY

I'm sorry, Mike.

Silence.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Tell me about the hate mail.

ATTORNEY

I don't think that's/

THE MOTHER AFTER

Lee. Please. What do they say? We're the cause?

ATTORNEY

More or less.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Are they threatening us? Michael and me?

ATTORNEY

The police don't think any of the threats are credible.

THE MOTHER AFTER

To hurt us?/

THE FATHER

Death threats?

ATTORNEY

There are some, yes.

THE FATHER

How do they measure "credible?"

THE MOTHER AFTER

What would killing us accomplish?

ATTORNEY

John isn't here anymore. To. To. (*deep breath*) Focus the anger on.

THE MOTHER AFTER

I don't un . . .

THE FATHER

My brother's getting hate mail. My uncle Fred. All the cousins on my father's side.

THE MOTHER A

Everyone with the Curtis name. Are the police aware of that?

ATTORNEY

Yes.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Probably total strangers too. Unfortunate enough to have our name.

ATTORNEY

We doubt there's anything serious in what's been received thus far. The police are monitoring very carefully.

THE FATHER

How's that done? Some kind of screening procedure?

ATTORNEY

They analyze based on a set of flags.

THE FATHER

Such as?

ATTORNEY

I don't know exactly, Mike. I can ask the chief investigator if you really want me to.

Silence.

Look, I trust that the police know what they're doing. And you need to trust them too.

THE MOTHER AFTER

These aren't letters from the families/

ATTORNEY

No, no, definitely not.

Silence.

So, listen, there are a couple of things to talk through tonight. First, I want to say again that it's critical that you don't talk to anyone outside of your closest and most immediate family members.

THE FATHER

We know.

ATTORNEY

The thing is, Mike, the more time that goes by, the more likely you'll want to explain things from your perspective. It's natural. But, you just can't.

THE FATHER

Because someone could sue us?

ATTORNEY

Law suits are inevitable, whether you talk or not. But that's down the road. We'll handle it when the time comes. Right now, we're just focusing on security. And with tensions so high, anything you say, I mean anything, any kind of public statement or private conversation that gets leaked, it could, uhm. It could escalate the situation.

THE MOTHER AFTER

I see. (*looking at The Father*) We understand.

ATTORNEY

One other thing. My firm has had a call from Pitt legal affairs. Apparently various university units are being contacted by media to such an extent that they can't get work done.

THE MOTHER AFTER

I heard from the secretary that they've been harassing my department chair.

THE FATHER

A glimpse of that silver lining/

THE MOTHER AFTER

Michael.

ATTORNEY

They didn't mention that to me. What the University legal team seems concerned about are the calls into the registrar's office.

THE FATHER

The registrar's office?

ATTORNEY

They seem to want John's matriculation records.

THE FATHER

What do they care about his academic record?

ATTORNEY

It's their job, Mike. They care about everything they can dig up. Student privacy rights restrict the university from releasing any information on his matriculation. But their lawyers think if you and Jill release a statement explaining those details that the reporters will back off.

THE FATHER

He attended for two semesters. He did so-so the first semester. He flunked out the second.

ATTORNEY

Last fall and this spring?

THE FATHER

Yes.

ATTORNEY

(to Jill)

Did he take any classes with you, Jill?

THE MOTHER AFTER

No. He was a freshman. He was taking General Ed courses. I teach upper level courses.

ATTORNEY

Okay. Well, I think that's all they need. I better get back to the office.

Gathering jacket and briefcase. Pause.

ATTORNEY

Can you tell me what went wrong this spring?

THE MOTHER AFTER

He wasn't studying.

THE FATHER

He said he didn't feel like it was the right place for him. He wanted to transfer. Maybe some place out of state.

ATTORNEY

Did he live in the dorms?

THE MOTHER AFTER

In the fall. After the winter break he asked to move back into his room at home.

ATTORNEY

So he was living at home when/

THE MOTHER AFTER

He wasn't/

THE FATHER

We don't know where he was living then.

ATTORNEY

When did he move out?

THE FATHER

About a month after he stopped going to classes. Late March.

ATTORNEY

Why did he move out?

Pause.

THE MOTHER AFTER

We asked him to.

ATTORNEY

Was there a problem with him living at home?

THE FATHER

We asked him to go back to therapy. We told/

THE MOTHER AFTER

I told him that he couldn't live with us if he wasn't going to try.

THE FATHER

Jill/

THE MOTHER AFTER

(crying softly)

I kicked him out.

THE FATHER

Jill, don't/

THE MOTHER AFTER

(to Michael)

I did. I did.

ATTORNEY

Jill. That can't be the/

THE MOTHER AFTER

I'm so sorry, Michael. *(sobbing)* I'm so sorry.

THE FATHER

(holding her)

No no no no no.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(from across the stage)

I'm so sorry.

ATTORNEY

(to The MOTHER AFTER and The Father)

You two are not . . . That's not the reason. Oh Jesus.

Scene 7 - Playground in Starlight: 2

Playground. Starlight.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

I think to myself, this is some kind of puzzle.

THE MOTHER AFTER

So I look at the pieces.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

I look and I look and I look.

THE MOTHER AFTER

But every time I find a piece that seems to fit it reveals another strange edge.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Another blank space.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Another thing I didn't see.

THE MOTHER AFTER and THE MOTHER BEFORE

I am the loneliest person in the world.

Scene 8 - Before: 1

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Can I squeeze in here?

THE FATHER

Sure.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(sitting)

Thanks. It's so crowded. I can't seem to get that bar tender's attention.

THE FATHER

Dollar night.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(craning to see)

Maybe if I go over to the other side/

THE FATHER

Wait. I'll get her for you. Hey, Pam! Yeah, I know, I know, it's tough times all around but my friend here needs a *(turning to The MOTHER BEFORE)* . . .?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

A Guinness.

THE FATHER

A Guinness. And hurry! *(turning to The MOTHER BEFORE)*. Where'd you pick up that habit?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

I did my undergraduate at Oxford.

THE FATHER

Well. Okay.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

It's not as hard to get into as you think.

THE FATHER

If you say so. *(picking up his glass)* Cheers?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(looking at her empty hand, lifting it playfully) Cheers.

THE FATHER

What do you study?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Comparative lit.

THE FATHER

So compare me some lit.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(laughing)

Oh, I couldn't.

THE FATHER

Sure you could. What's the last thing you read that really turned you on? Intellectually speaking, of course.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Of course. *(pause)* A story about a sea shell.

THE FATHER

A sea shell?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

And Shakespeare.

THE FATHER

I'm all ears.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

When we go to the sea shore and pick up a conch shell, what do we say we hear when we put it to our ear?

THE FATHER

(smiling)

We *say* we hear the ocean.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

But.

THE FATHER

But we're actually hearing our own circulatory system.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Right. Very good.

THE FATHER

And the Shakespeare part?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

When we pick up *Hamlet*, we *say* we're reading Shakespeare.

THE FATHER

But?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

We're actually reading ourselves.

THE FATHER

How so?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Hamlet is only as stable as our own interpretation, at any given moment in time. When we read *Hamlet* we hear our own circulatory system.

THE FATHER

Hmmm.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(embarrassed)

Well it's a theory, anyway/

THE FATHER

No, no. I love it. I'm just deep in thought. Do you know anything about quantum mechanics?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(laughing)

God no! I opted for Physics for Poets in undergrad. I'm guessing you took the real thing?

THE FATHER

I'm a doctoral student in Physics.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Here?

THE FATHER

Yes. Just finishing my dissertation proposal.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

I'm still studying for my comps. It's taking forever.

THE FATHER

You'll get there.

They pause to look at each other.

So can I tell you where your sea shell story led my physics brain?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Please do.

THE FATHER

We talk about something called the observer effect. It refers to changes that the act of observation make on the phenomenon being observed.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Like the uncertainty principle? Looking at something changes it?

THE FATHER

In a way, sure. But Heisenberg, well, that's a concept that's often been, uhm, you know, misused.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Whoops.

THE FATHER

Well, maybe misused is a bit harsh, but the concept is often mistakenly taken as a psychological thing.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

You're starting to lose me here.

THE FATHER

Yeah, I have that tendency. Look, at the risk of revealing my essential dullness to a really, uhm, interesting woman, what I'm talking about is basic hard-core physics. Are you up for that? If I can actually manage to procure that beer for you?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(smiling—charmed)

Why not?

THE FATHER

(yelling)

Pam! Her Guinness? Now please? And, uh, one for me while you're at it. *(putting out his hand)* I'm Michael, by the way.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(taking his hand) Jill.

THE FATHER

Jill. So. Uhhh, the observer effect—changing the thing we are looking at—is usually the result of the instruments we use to look at the object. An example would be using a light source to look at a particle. We have to be able to see it, right? So, we shine light on it, and that process causes the particle itself to emit light, and so then the particle experiences a change.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

That’s really interesting. I guess I thought Heisenberg was talking about the impact of the mind of the observer. You know, what our perspectives do to our objectivity.

THE FATHER

You and lots of other people.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

More poetic that way.

THE FATHER

(nodding)

More poetic.

Another moment of looking at each other.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

So I can’t change you just by staring.

THE FATHER

(pleasantly embarrassed)

Oh, my good lady from Oxford. I don’t think I should answer that.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(laughing)

I don’t think you should either.

Scene 9 - A Killer in the Family: 2

A television studio.

NBC ANNOUNCER

We return to “A Killer in the Family,” an NBC special report.

THE ANCHOR

On May 23rd, 2016, John Curtis entered a locker room in the Athletic Center of Kennedy High School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In the course of the next ten minutes he killed thirteen student athletes and four coaches before turning the gun on himself. I’m a mother of two sons,

and I think I can speak for other parents watching this evening when I say that it would be an unimaginable horror to discover that one of my children had committed murder. (*swiveling in chair to face The MOTHER AFTER*) Mrs. Curtis, I know it can't be easy to be sitting in that chair. I want to begin by thanking you for your willingness to be here.

**The year of the shooting should be adjusted so that it is five years earlier than the year of production.*

THE MOTHER AFTER

You're welcome.

THE ANCHOR

On April 16, 2007, Virginia Tech gunman Seung-Hui Cho killed 32 people before shooting himself. His sister stated that the family, and I quote here, "never could have envisioned that he was capable of so much violence. He has made the world weep. We are living a nightmare." (*turning to look at The MOTHER AFTER*). Mrs. Curtis, are you living a nightmare too?

THE MOTHER AFTER

(pause)

It has been a nightmare, yes.

THE ANCHOR

And surely it must be very difficult to talk about. So, let me begin with the question that I think is on our viewers' minds: Why are you here tonight? You and your husband have refused all interview requests for the past five years. What's changed?

THE MOTHER AFTER

I'm here because I understand that people need an explanation.

THE ANCHOR

About the reason for the shootings?

THE MOTHER AFTER

(nodding)

About the reason.

THE ANCHOR

(looking at her notes)

Before we go any further, I'd like to make it clear to our viewers that we issued this invitation to both you and to your husband, Michael Curtis, who declined to participate. Is there a specific reason why Mr. Curtis is not here with you?

THE MOTHER AFTER

I really can't speak for Michael.

THE ANCHOR

You've separated.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Yes.

THE ANCHOR

Just recently, as I understand it.

Silence.

My research notes say your papers were filed . . . (*reading*) two weeks ago. (*pause*) Do I have that right?

THE MOTHER AFTER

Yes. That's correct.

THE ANCHOR

I see. Well, again I just have to say how brave you are, Dr. Curtis/

THE MOTHER AFTER

Jill.

THE ANCHOR

Jill. To be willing to speak in public like this. To face head on these painful questions. On your own. It must be very difficult.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Difficult? (*sharp laugh*) This?

Camera lights off.

Scene 10 - Playground in Starlight: 3

Playground. Starlight.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(puts hand on Jill's forearm)

Jill.

Silence.

You're angry/

THE MOTHER AFTER

You think?

I'm sorry. **THE MOTHER BEFORE**

(derisive laugh)
I'm sure you are. **THE MOTHER AFTER**

Will you look at me please? **THE MOTHER BEFORE**
Silence

Jill. Please? **THE MOTHER AFTER**
I can't.

This isn't helping. **THE MOTHER BEFORE**

Oh really? **THE MOTHER AFTER**

I need you to look at me! Look me in the eyes. **THE MOTHER BEFORE**

You mean the way people look at *me*? **THE MOTHER AFTER**

How? **THE MOTHER BEFORE**

When people look at me now . . . **THE MOTHER AFTER**

What? Tell me. Please. **THE MOTHER BEFORE**

When people look at me now, their eyes/ **THE MOTHER AFTER**

Yes? **THE MOTHER BEFORE**

are full of . . . **THE MOTHER AFTER**

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Pity . . .

THE MOTHER AFTER

Disgust.

Scene 11 - Before: 2

At home.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Watcha making honey? Is that part of a castle?

THE SON

(picks it up and points it at her)

Bang!

THE MOTHER BEFORE

We don't play guns in our house. Remember? *(sitting)* Let's use the Legos to make a castle/

THE SON

Why?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Or what about a train. We'll build one that looks just like Thomas.

THE SON

(continuing to build)

Andy likes guns. And so does Miles. And Kyle. And/

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Look, here's a blue piece. Blue just like Thomas. See?

THE SON

(looking directly at her)

It's *my* toy, mommy.

Scene 12 - Bad Moms: 1

A screen appears with the words: "Mother Blaming: A Brief History!"

BAD MOMS' HALL OF FAME HOST

Ladies and Gentlemen. Boys and Girls! Welcome to the Bad Moms' Hall of Fame! Tonight we present a lecture slide show entitled: "Mother Blaming: A Brief History!"

(projector slide click) Cause of autism: "refrigerator moms."

(projector slide click) “From *The American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 1949.”

(projector slide click) Cause of schizophrenia: “maternal rejection.”

(projector slide click) “From *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 1958.”

(projector slide click) Cause of anorexia: “troubled mother-daughter relationships.”

(projector slide click) “From *Psychology Today*, 2010.”

(projector slide click) Cause of homosexuality: “an unsolved masochistic conflict of earliest infancy with the mother”

(projector slide click) “an overly protective mom”

(projector slide click) “an overly independent mom”

(projector slide click) “a domineering mom”

(projector slide click) “an infantilizing mom.”

(projector slide click) “From *Patterns of Sexual Behavior*, 1951”

(projector slide click) “*Homosexuality: Disease or Way of Life?*, 1957”

(projector slide click) “*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 1972”

(projector slide click) “*Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life*, 1991”

(projector slide click) “*A Parent’s Guide to Preventing Homosexuality*, 2002.”

Scene 13 - Thanatos Diaries: 2

Alone somewhere. Recording on his phone camera.

THE SON

Welcome back to the “Thanatos Diaries.” Episode Two.

So. I’ve been thinking about Evil. Not surprising. *(shrugs)* I mean I know what people are going to say about me.

What does Evil look like? Red tail? Pitchfork? Horns? Let me show you my sketch book.

(puts a sketch pad up to the camera)

Drew this at 5 am—wired! (*scrutinizing the drawing*) I'll probably need to do some touch ups later. Still, I think it's pretty good.

(*pointing*)

See the wings? (*laughing*) Not just for angels anymore.

Scene 14 - Before: 3

The park. Sunshine.

SANDY

Apparently it was a roadside bomb.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

It's so dangerous over there.

SANDY

I don't know how I'd handle it if Connor or Brendan joined the army. Can you imagine waking up to that fear every day?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

She told Mary Jane that they came to the house. You know, to tell them in person.

THE MOTHER AFTER

They always come in person.

SANDY

Wasn't there a movie about that? About a guy in the army and that's his job?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Some job.

SANDY

Why'd he join up? He was a smart kid. He could easily have gone to college.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

9/11 factor?

SANDY

In that family? (*shaking her head*) Not the right political profile.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Michael always says boys have their own code.

SANDY

Meaning?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

I think he means they have their own internal logic.

SANDY

Different from women?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

He says it's biological.

THE MOTHER AFTER

X's and Y's.

SANDY

You know what my grandmother used to say? About having boys? She'd say she was so glad she had girls because men have it too hard in life.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Are you kidding me? Wish *I'd* had it so hard.

SANDY

Seriously. She'd say: "They have to punch out the bully on the playground. They have to earn a living for the family. They have to go to war."

THE MOTHER BEFORE

My mother used to always say that men *want* to go to war.

SANDY

Want to? Why?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

"Because they don't have any other way of making friends."

SANDY

That's a bit cliché, even for *your* mother!

THE MOTHER BEFORE

I guess they have to find *some* way to bond.

SANDY and THE MOTHER AFTER

"Bond." Hate that word.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

How about "bromance?"

SANDY

Yuck.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(laughing) I'd rather see a bromance film than yet another band-of-brothers movie any day.

SANDY

It's like in Hollywood there are only two genres of men. You know what I mean? Loser push-overs or aggressive assholes. And there's always got to be some kind of a pissing contest.

THE SON

(yelling as he runs in)

Mom! Mom! Jarrod just took my Frisbee. He just took it from me!

SANDY

(gesturing toward The Son.)

Exhibit A.

Laughter.

THE SON

Mom!

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Calm down. Take a breath. C'mon, honey.

THE SON

He just took it!

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Okay. Did you ask him to give it back?

THE SON

But he just took it!

SANDY

(looking off)

Where's Brendan? I can't see him.

THE SON

He's playing with my Frisbee too.

SANDY

Oh, yeah, I see him.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Did you ask Jarrod to give it back?

THE SON

He was making fun of the way I throw.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Making fun?

THE SON

He took it and said: "This is how you throw a Frisbee."

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Well maybe he was just trying to give you some pointers, to/

THE MOTHER AFTER

Help/

THE MOTHER BEFORE

help you learn. Isn't that okay?

THE SON

No. He was making fun of me. (*He runs off.*)

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Where are you going?

THE SON

Home.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Oh c'mon, Jack. It's only four o'clock. Jack! (*to SANDY*) Sorry Sandy. He's, I don't know, gotten really sensitive lately.

SANDY

Ten is kind of a transition time for a lot of boys. Connor had some issues around that age I remember.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

I better go.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Stay.

SANDY

It might do him good to stew in it for a little while. Let him work it out by himself?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

No, I'd better go talk to him. I want to get this resolved before dinner time. Try to salvage the evening, you know?

THE MOTHER AFTER

Don't go.

SANDY

Do you want to come over tomorrow and bake some pies to take to the wake?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

I'm up to my neck in grading.

SANDY

Oh. Okay. I'll guess, uhm, I can make two then.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(exiting hurriedly) Oh, Sandy, sorry but I really have to go.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Sitting on the bench, watching The Mother Before as she walks away
Should have stayed.

Scene 15 - Playground in Starlight: 4

Playground. Starlight.

THE MOTHER AFTER

So this is what it looks like. For the rest of my life.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Jill.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Just you. And me. Hiding here. In starlight.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

There is forgiveness.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Would you? If it had been Jack who was murdered in cold blood?

Silence.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

There is Grace.

THE MOTHER AFTER

No Jill. Not for this. (*turning to look at her*) Not for us.
Silence.

I'll never make a new friend again.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

That can't be true.

THE MOTHER AFTER

(sharp laugh)

Go out and have drinks? Complain about how our husbands don't really listen to us? Share concerns about our children? My new friend can tell me she's worried her son is too aggressive and I'll listen and I'll be sympathetic and I'll tell her: oh, c'mon now it's okay some boys just have lots of testosterone that's okay and anyway someday he'll put that aggression to good use by becoming a hard-ass lawyer or finance guy or something and he'll make lots of money so you can retire in luxury and we'll laugh and she'll say thanks for calming me down and I'll say what are friends for and she'll say how are things with you and yours and I'll say. (*gasps for air*) I'll say. (*puts her hands over her mouth*)

Scene 16 - Before: 4

Playground picnic area. Early evening.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Good burger, Michael.

SANDY

Feta cheese and olives. Nice touch.

THE FATHER

What'd you think of the burgers, Brendan? Brendan?

BRENDAN

(on his phone)

Cool.

THE FATHER

(nudging The Son)

And your partner in crime here?

THE SON

(on his phone)

Cool.

SANDY

Men of few words.

THE FATHER

But many texts.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(to The Father)

Okay--it's party time! Michael, can you get the cake? It's in the trunk.

THE FATHER

Sure.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Sandy, should we wait for Dan? Was that him texting before?

SANDY

He's got a brief due tomorrow. He was up all last night and now he says he's still not finished.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

It's okay.

SANDY

Is it?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

He's under a lot of pressure.

SANDY

Yep. Like every other adult here. Who still somehow managed to make it to Jack's twelfth birthday party.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(touching her arm) Sandy.

SANDY

I'm . . .

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(softly) You don't need to worry about our feelings. It really is okay.

SANDY

It's just. I mean. How many times is it okay before it's not? What's the calculus there?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Brendan seems to be doing better. Yes? He's not so focused on Dan's absences these days?

SANDY

Yes, but only because he's reached the age of total oblivion to parents.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Well, at least that's one good thing about adolescence, eh?

SANDY

(looking at the boys on their phones) Yep. One good thing. Hey you two, get off your phones and come help us clear off the picnic table.

No response.

Brendan! Jack!

THE SON

John.

SANDY

Sorry. *(to The MOTHER BEFORE)* I called him Jack for 12 years and now all the sudden/

THE SON and BRENDAN

It's John.

SANDY

Right. Got it. John, please come help clear the table.

THE FATHER

(coming back with cake, singing)

Happy birthday to you.

THE MOTHER AFTER, THE MOTHER BEFORE, THE FATHER, BRENDAN, SANDY

Happy Birthday to you. Happy Birthday dear John. Happy Birthday to you.

The Son blows out the candles.

THE FATHER

Twelve takes lots of wind power.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

What did you wish for?

THE SON

I don't know.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Wings?

BRENDAN

What?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Jac . . . John used to always wish for wings. Every birthday.

BRENDAN

That'd be so cool. To have wings.

THE SON

It was a little kid thing.

THE FATHER

It was adorable.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

It really was. (*to The Son*) You had big dreams even as a four-year-old.

THE FATHER

You still have big dreams John?

THE SON

Yeah, I guess.

THE FATHER

Still want to be a famous cartoonist?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

I haven't seen you with your sketchbook in a while. Where is it?

THE SON

In my room.

BRENDAN

We started working on a graphic novel together.

SANDY

Brendan, that's great.

BRENDAN

I'm doing the story line.

SANDY

I want to read it.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

What's it about?

Silence.

John?

THE FATHER

Not for parents' eyes probably.

SANDY

Is that it, Brendan? Too cool for us?

BRENDAN

I don't know. (*looking at The Son*) Maybe.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

I understand. I used to draw cartoons of boys I liked. I would never have shown them to my parents.

SANDY

What? The famous feminist Shakespeare scholar Jill Curtis drawing adolescent love doodles?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

It was a little bit more than love doodling.

THE FATHER

Oh yeah?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

I'm not as straight-laced as you think!

THE FATHER

Did you draw one of me?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

I met you when I was in graduate school!

THE FATHER

(*playfully*)

So?

SANDY

You two need to get a room?

THE SON

(*to Brendan*)

Dude—let's go over to the courts and see who's there.

THE FATHER

Sorry John, we've embarrassed you.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Don't you want some cake?

THE SON

Maybe later.

THE FATHER

(to The Son)

Hey John, we'll text when it's time to leave.

SANDY

(shaking head)

John.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

I miss my Jackie boy. *(smiling at the memory)* Jack n' Jill. *(to Brendan's Mother)* Sandy, do you remember the ceramic heart he made for me?

SANDY

The one with Jack + Jill written on it.

THE MOTHER AFTER

In his sweet little boy hand-writing.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

It seems to embarrass him now. I get the impression that maybe some boys teased him?

THE FATHER

Boys have their own creed. You just have to let him sort it out, Jill.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

If I'd known he'd change his name from Jack I never would have agreed to naming him John in the first place.

THE FATHER

Blame it on my mother.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

I never understood that. She insisted we name him after her father. Whom she totally despised.

THE FATHER

Don't look at me.

SANDY

Too many weird alternate usages for the name “John.”

THE MOTHER BEFORE

I know! What is that, anyway? Toilets and guys who hire prostitutes.

THE FATHER

Or headless Baptists.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Michael, how big a piece of cake do you want?

THE FATHER

Pretty big?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

If you say so. Sandy?

SANDY

Better not. (*pause*). So. Jack/ Damn it. *John* quit the team?

THE FATHER

It appears so.

SANDY

Brendan is really upset about it. I think he feels abandoned.

THE FATHER

Maybe he’s not coordinated enough anymore. That’s how it was for me at that age.

SANDY

What’s he saying about it?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

He won’t say anything. And believe me/I’ve tried.

THE MOTHER AFTER

I tried.

THE FATHER

He’s not the only kid who discovers he doesn’t like sports once adolescence hits.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

I suppose.

SANDY

He'll pick up another interest.

THE FATHER

I hope he doesn't stop drawing too. (*pause*) He was always such an engaged little kid. But now/

SANDY

I swear it's the damn phones.

THE FATHER

Yah, maybe.

SANDY

Anyway, he'll figure it out. Connor had a bunch of issues around this age. If you ask me you just have to work through/

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Let's start cleaning up, okay? I have to write a lecture tonight.

Scene 17 - Before: 5

A lecture hall.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Hmmmm. That's an interesting perspective, Megan. I think you're right that he isn't really interested in women, at least not in the way *we're* interested in them—as fully realized, fully authenticated selves. I mean, how could he be? He's a product of his time and his place and his privilege. He's just a man, just human. Like all of us.

So maybe that's why we see so few mothers in the plays. And, essentially, no effective mothering. Lady Capulet, while she might think she has Juliet's best interests in mind, isn't an advocate for her daughter but rather for the system of wealth maintenance that rules her life and supports her socio-economic status. And don't get me started on Gertrude. Jeesh.

But even with this gender imbalance, I think there's a lot of attention paid to parenthood and parenting in the plays. And a lot of celebrating the role that parents play in their children's lives. It's just that for Shakespeare—and this is fascinating—a “parent” has to be a man, a father. Mothers are absent because, well, they have no social status, no agency. In societal terms, they can't be the cause of anything meaningful. So, they don't make very good characters.

Okay, let me get something up on the board. (*writing*) Prot-agon-istes. Who can translate the Greek? Olivia? Yes, that's right. “Pro” from “proto” or “first.”

And “agonistes?” Who's got it? Go ahead and use your phones. I'll wait. (*listening*) Thanks Kevin. That's right. (*writing*) One of the Greek words for “actor.” So, protagonist means the first or lead actor. The one who pulls the story along.

All these motherless daughters—Miranda and Portia and Cordelia and, alas, pitiful Ophelia. Unable to push forward their own stories—instead pulled along by others. Until the end of the play, when they either die or get married. And are silenced.

Scene 18 - Before: 6

At home.

BRENDAN

(looking at The Son's cell phone)

What an asshole.

THE SON

There's like twenty posts already.

BRENDAN

Don't even read it. Why you reading it?

THE SON

You know it's him.

THE MOTHER BEFORE (voice)

(calling)

John.

BRENDAN

That kid's an asshole and you should just/

THE SON

It's like all over the school/

BRENDAN

/ignore it.

THE SON

Yeah. Right. Like you would if he was posting this shit about you.

THE MOTHER BEFORE (voice)

(calling)

John!

BRENDAN

I mean he's such an idiot. You shouldn't let it bother you so/

THE SON

Quit patronizing me Brendan.

BRENDAN

I'm just saying/

THE SON

You're acting like my fucking moth/

BRENDAN

ignore it, dude. That kid's like a total loser and you should just/

THE SON

Whatever/

BRENDAN

leave it al/

THE SON

Whatever!
(yelling)

BRENDAN

THE SON

BRENDAN

THE SON

(goes back to his phone, quietly)
Just . . . whatever.

BRENDAN

You're fucking moody today dude.

Silence.

THE MOTHER BEFORE (voice)

(knocking on door)

John?

THE SON

What?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Is Brendan staying for dinner? (opening door, to Brendan) Your mother wants to know.

BRENDAN

Uhm. Sure.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

And how's the studying going?

THE SON AND BRENDAN

Fine.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Everything okay in here?

THE SON

It's fine, mom.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Okay. Hey, Brendan. Are *you* going to the junior high graduation dance?

BRENDAN

(looking at The Son)

I might.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

That's great. With who?

THE SON

Mom.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Sorry. None of my business. Still learning the ropes on teenagers and boundaries. *(to Brendan)*
You've got an older brother, so your mom is probably much better at parenting thirteen year olds/

THE SON

Mom, please?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Dinner's in an hour. *(to The Son as she shuts the door)* Get the homework done.

THE SON

(pointing to phone)

Check this out.

BRENDAN

I'm not gonna read any more of that shit/

THE SON

No, no. It's this insane blog I found. You have to check it out. Look at my phone. Seriously.

BRENDAN

(takes phone, reads for a minute)

People writing about death? I'm confused. Like if someone in their family dies?

THE SON

Like if *they're* dying.

BRENDAN

Did you know Adam's father has cancer? My mom said that he probably won't live very long/

THE SON

Read *it*.

BRENDAN

Okay! Calm down dude.

THE SON

This post here. From this Canadian guy.

BRENDAN

(finishes reading)

So?

THE SON

Dude posted it the day *after* he died.

BRENDAN

Right.

THE SON

I'm serious. *(grabs phone back)* Let me read it to you. Ready for this? "I'm dead, and this is my last post to this blog."

BRENDAN

Sick. Where do you find this stuff?

Scene 19 - A Killer in the Family: 3

A television studio.

ANNOUNCER

We return now to A Killer in the Family.

THE ANCHOR

Dr. Burkhalter, besides your forensic work, you also have a clinical practice in psychology.

DR. BURKHAULTER

Yes. I specialize in treating adolescents.

THE ANCHOR

And you've written a book about parenting in contemporary America. (*looking at notes*) It's titled *The Rod and The Reproof?* With a question mark at the end.

DR. BURKHAULTER

The quote comes from *Proverbs*, 29.15: "The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame." (*smiling*) The question mark is my own.

THE ANCHOR

Meaning?

DR. BURKHAULTER

Meaning that brain science is giving us a whole new window into the biological aspects of personality. Neuroscientists have a new motto: "It's chemistry, not character."

THE ANCHOR

Behavior is mandated by our chemicals?

DR. BURKHAULTER

To a large extent, yes. As I said earlier, almost all the shooters I've studied came from intact and relatively stable families, economically privileged, with no history of child abuse.

THE ANCHOR

Okay, so then help us understand what this means. Why are these relatively privileged young men capable of such senseless violence?

DR. BURKHAULTER

My research shows that these acts of violence make sense to the killer. To them it is not "senseless." In fact, it is perhaps the single most sensible action they have ever taken.

THE ANCHOR

But they're clearly delusional. They don't understand right from wrong.

DR. BURKHAULTER

No, they *do* understand. That's the important idea here. Inside the mind of the killer the act of lethal violence fits into an idea of right and wrong that they've carefully constructed out of their experiences in the world.

THE ANCHOR

Some might be hearing this as an excuse? Another "blame society" type of argument?

DR. BURKHAULTER

Even mentally disturbed people act within a cultural framework. And, to them that framework has a clear logic to it.

THE ANCHOR

Can you give an example?

DR. BURKHAULTER

Elliot Rodger/

THE ANCHOR

Just, sorry, just to clarify for our viewers—the twenty-two-year-old shooter/

DR. BURKHAULTER

Yes/

THE ANCHOR

who targeted sorority girls at the University of California at Santa Barbara.

DR. BURKHAULTER

Yes. Elliot Rodger lived inside a logical cultural frame that was, as cultural frames are for most of us, unnegotiable. He was a straight white male, he had a nice car, was good-looking, fit, educated. By the social contract as he was led to understand it, women were supposed to like him.

THE ANCHOR

(looking at notes) He suffered from what one psychologist calls “aggrieved masculinity.”

DR. BURKHAULTER

I would say so, yes.

THE ANCHOR

Just because the girls don’t want to date you doesn’t mean you kill them. C’mon.

DR. BURKHAULTER

But in fact it does mean that. To a young man like Elliot Rodger.

THE ANCHOR

He was mentally ill. Right?

DR. BURKHAULTER

Look, generally psychologists ascribe five factors on the roadmap to a school shooting. The list includes mental illness, cultural scripts/

THE ANCHOR

Such as “aggrieved masculinity.”

DR. BURKHAULTER

Right. As I was saying, mental illness, cultural scripts, and then also the factors of social marginalization, the failure of the surveillance system, and, finally, the availability of guns.

THE ANCHOR

Wow. Where to start?

DR. BURKHAULTER

Indeed.

THE ANCHOR

I think many parents are increasingly concerned with the impact of social marginalization. A lot of the school shooters you've examined are victims of gay-baiting, yes?

DR. BURKHAULTER

Nearly all of America's school shooters were teased, threatened and in some cases assaulted—on a routine basis. For these kids high school was a homophobic gauntlet.

THE ANCHOR

And yet from what I've read there is no evidence that any of them were gay.

DR. BURKHAULTER

That's correct.

THE ANCHOR

They were just different from other boys—shy, bookish, artistic/

DR. BURKHAULTER

Or just unable to perform gender according to the current codes of masculinity.

THE ANCHOR

“Perform gender?” (*laughing*) Doctor, I think you'll need to decode that for us.

DR. BURKHAULTER

Sure. Psychologists use the term “perform” because it highlights the fact that gendered behavior—how a boy “should” act—is largely determined by the culture he lives in.

THE ANCHOR

So a boy performs being macho when he's around other boys at, say, a sports practice?

DR. BURKHAULTER

Yes, that's right.

THE ANCHOR

Okay, I see your point. But doctor, throughout history children have been picked on, bullied, gay-baited. And we didn't have this . . . phenomenon of school violence.

DR. BURKHAULTER

That's where the other factors on the roadmap come into play.

THE ANCHOR

Over-worked parents. Under-resourced schools.

DR. BURKHAULTER

Guns.

THE ANCHOR

I understand that you are active in gun control efforts.

DR. BURKHAULTER

I am.

THE ANCHOR

Okay. Okay. Let's talk about that now. (*looking at notes*). The day of the Newtown massacre, President Barack Obama called for "meaningful action" on gun control legislation while the nation sobbed in horror and despair. And yet here we are in 2021, at least 2,600 mass shootings later.* How do you respond?

DR. BURKHAULTER

With shame.

**This date and number should be updated at the time of production.*

<https://www.vox.com/a/mass-shootings-america-sandy-hook-gun-violence>

Scene 20 - Playground in Starlight: 5

Playground. Starlight.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

We don't have to explain it.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Are you kidding me?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

We can't explain it!

THE MOTHER AFTER

And yet that's all anyone will ever want from me. For the rest of my life.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(*shaking her head*) Such an unconscionable/

Yes! See, that's just it. **THE MOTHER AFTER**

What/ **THE MOTHER BEFORE**

It *is* unconscionable. **THE MOTHER AFTER**

Yes, of course it is/ **THE MOTHER BEFORE**

I'm trying to tell you! **THE MOTHER AFTER**

Calm down/ **THE MOTHER BEFORE**

What John did is, it is/ **THE MOTHER AFTER**

Jill, please/ **THE MOTHER BEFORE**

THE MOTHER AFTER
(yelling)
What he did is *literally* un-conscion-able. It literally *cannot be thought*.

Pause.

And yet I am the one who has to explain it to the world.

If an intermission is needed, it should be taken here.

Scene 21 - Flash

VOICE
Could you have prevented what happened at Kennedy High School?

VOICE
Do you believe in evil?

VOICE
Was your son a monster?

VOICE

Does the apple fall far from the tree?

VOICE

Can you ever forgive yourself?

VOICES

What will you do with the rest of your life?

Scene 22 - Before: 7

The Park. Sunshine.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

The thing is, he just sort of stared at me.

SANDY

In the principal's office?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

After. In the car. We got buckled in, and I turned to say something to him. And this stare, it/

SANDY

(laughing)

Oh c'mon, he's fourteen years old. It's hormones.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

I thought he would break down. You know? Because he'd been caught.

SANDY

Maybe you're making too much of this?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

I don't know. He just . . . I don't know.

SANDY

You need to take a deep breath.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

But Sandy. He seemed so strange/

THE MOTHER AFTER

Seems, madam?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Out of character.

THE MOTHER AFTER

I know not seems.

SANDY

Oh, Jill, c'mon now.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(struggling) Or. Or.

SANDY

Hormones. *(standing)* You need to relax my friend. Let's go back to my house and open a bottle of wine.

Scene 23 - A Killer in the Family: 4

A television studio.

THE ANCHOR

We're back with Jill Curtis, mother of the Kennedy High School mass shooter. Jill, I think what confuses people the most is the fact that your son John could have put those videos on the internet without your knowing.

THE MOTHER AFTER

It confuses me too.

THE ANCHOR

You told police investigators that you and your husband didn't know about the "Thanatos Diaries."

THE MOTHER AFTER

We did not.

THE ANCHOR

So you're saying that you didn't know anything about John's fascination with death? His vlogs appeared on and off for the eight months leading up to the shootings/

THE MOTHER AFTER

He posted those things without using his name. We had no way of knowing that he was doing that.

THE ANCHOR

Short of looking at his computer files or his on-line history.

THE MOTHER AFTER

(pause)
Short of that.

THE ANCHOR

So you're saying that you never had any concerns about his behavior.

THE MOTHER AFTER

We had concerns. Like most parents of socially awkward children, we worried about his uneasiness.

THE ANCHOR

Uneasiness?

THE MOTHER AFTER

Around other kids.

THE ANCHOR

I'm not sure I follow?

THE MOTHER AFTER

He was shy.

THE ANCHOR

(checking her notes, leafing through clip board)

Forensic psychologists note that school shooters carry a profound sense of alienation with them, generally from adolescence onward.

THE MOTHER AFTER

He was not alienated. He was shy.

THE ANCHOR

You just used the word "uneasy." That seems different than "shy."

THE MOTHER AFTER

School was often stressful for him.

THE ANCHOR

Your son was bullied.

THE MOTHER AFTER

He had had some experiences with bullying in middle school. Yes.

THE ANCHOR

My notes say that for short periods, when John was (*reading*) thirteen and seventeen, he underwent therapy.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Yes.

THE ANCHOR

The details are confidential, of course. But I think you can understand why our viewers would want to know what he was treated for.

THE MOTHER AFTER

He was treated for depression.

THE ANCHOR

Depression?

THE MOTHER AFTER

Yes.

THE ANCHOR

Not (*reading from notes*) Intermittent Explosive Disorder.

THE MOTHER AFTER

That's an internet rumor.

THE ANCHOR

My research suggests that anger disorders in adolescent boys often go unrecognized/

THE MOTHER AFTER

It's a rumor.

THE ANCHOR

You didn't witness any evidence of an anger disorder in your son?

THE MOTHER AFTER

He was a shy person. He was a bit awkward physically. He wasn't particularly good at sports.

THE ANCHOR

Sounds like a lot of kids.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Yes. It does. (*pause*) He hit adolescence and suddenly his friends began disappearing. It made him sad.

THE ANCHOR

Not angry.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Not that kind of angry.

Scene 24 - Before: 8

An idling car.

THE FATHER

I said be waiting outside at eleven.

THE SON

We had to/

THE FATHER

It's midnight, for Christ's sake! Get in the car!

BRENDAN

(getting in car, putting on seat belt)

It's my fault. I lost my wallet. I had to get the janitor to let me back in so I could look under the seats.

THE FATHER

(pulling car into lane) Why didn't you call or text me?

BRENDAN

We were both like madly searching under the seats/

THE FATHER

Yeah, I get that Brendan. *(to The Son)* Why no heads up, John? Simple courtesy.

BRENDAN

The janitor was yelling at us to hurry up we couldn't stop he was like really mad about being kept and/

THE FATHER

(to The Son)

I've been circling this movie theatre for fifty minutes/

THE SON

Can you stop yelling at me in front of/

THE FATHER

Pain in the ass. You're fifteen years old you can't figure this out yet?

THE SON

Okay you want to know? They took my phone and smashed it. Okay? It's like totally smashed and broken. So I couldn't text you.

THE FATHER

What?

THE SON

They took it and smashed it.

THE FATHER

Who/

BRENDAN

They're like such assholes, Mr. C. They were harassing us and we tried to ignore them/

THE FATHER

Are you saying that someone took your phone and smashed it in the movie theatre?

Pause.

THE SON

Well. We were outside.

THE FATHER

During the movie?

BRENDAN

It was boring and we decided to take a walk and/

THE FATHER

(to The Son)

You left the movie theatre and what, ran into some other kids?

BRENDAN

We didn't actually run into them. There was this like party/

THE SON

Shut up Brendan.

THE FATHER

Party? Did you even go in to the movies?

Silence.

Where was this party?

THE SON

Market Square.

THE FATHER

So I dropped you off and then you went to a party downtown?

BRENDAN

Well I wouldn't call it a party. See I got this text from Melissa and she said to come to Market Square because a bunch of kids were going to hang out just like you know in that little park and/

THE FATHER

Let me get this straight. You went downtown to hang out, and some kids took your phone and smashed it. Is that what you're saying?

THE SON

Yes.

THE FATHER

Why?

BRENDAN

They're such jerks Mr. C. It's like they're just constantly trying to prove how cool they are like they're all manly and shit because they can grab a stupid cell phone and smash it as if that proves/

THE SON and THE FATHER

Shut up Brendan.

Silence.

THE FATHER

Who is "they?"

THE SON

You know. The jocks.

THE FATHER

The kid who posted that crap last year?

BRENDAN

Him and his cretin/

THE SON

(shooting Brendan a look) Whatever.

THE FATHER

Why would you go to a party with them?

THE SON

We didn't know who was going to be there.

BRENDAN

Melissa said some kids from band. So we were like we should go. You know?

Silence. They drive for a while.

THE FATHER

Did you say something?

THE SON

What d'you mean?

THE FATHER

How did it get started?

THE SON

So it's my fault?

THE FATHER

I just want to understand how it started/

THE SON

I don't want to talk about it.

THE FATHER

Did you try to get the phone back?

THE SON

You mean did I fight back/

BRENDAN

Those guys are huge Mr. C. And anyway that's what they want, you know? Any excuse to start throwing punches. Neanderthals.

Pause.

THE FATHER

So they just walked up to you and took your phone?

THE SON

Now *you're* going to humiliate me?

THE FATHER

No. No. That's not what I meant. Oh Christ. Okay. Look, we'll talk about this when we get home. Okay? Let's just. Let's just wait until we get home.

Scene 25 - After: 2

At home.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Michael.

THE FATHER

Yep?

THE MOTHER AFTER

I have something to show you. It's the heart. The Jack + Jill heart. It was wedged behind his dresser.

THE FATHER

The police probably broke it when they tore his room apart.

THE MOTHER AFTER

No. *(pause)* Michael, I took it off of his wall years ago.

THE FATHER

Why?

THE MOTHER AFTER

He asked me to.

THE FATHER

When?

THE MOTHER AFTER

About the time he started calling himself John.

Silence.

I think he took it out of my keepsake drawer and broke it deliberately. And then hid it there. Behind the dresser.

THE FATHER

(taking the two pieces of ceramic and trying to piece them together)

Here, let me have it. I'll fix it. I can fix it. *(he starts to sob)*

THE MOTHER AFTER

Michael.

Scene 26 - A Killer in the Family: 5

A television studio.

THE ANCHOR

The worst mass murder on school grounds in the United States took place in 1923 in Bath, Michigan. The murderer, a 50-year-old farmer named Andrew Kehoe, used dynamite to blow up the town's elementary school. He killed 38 elementary school children before killing himself. When police went to Kehoe's farm they found a suicide note nailed to a fence. The note read simply: "Criminals are made, not born."

Turning to face DR. BURKHAULTER)

Dr. Burkhauler. I understand that a fifty-year-old farmer isn't the demographic you study in your book. But I think you'll grant me that the question embedded in Kehoe's haunting note still lingers. Is it nature, or is it nurture? Just what *are* parents responsible for?

DR. BURKHAULTER

Might I suggest that a better question would be, what is society responsible for?

THE ANCHOR

All due respect, Doctor, but I really need to press you on this. Who "made" John Curtis into a criminal?

DR. BURKHAULTER

The war culture that surrounded him.

THE ANCHOR

War culture? What do you mean?

DR. BURKHAULTER

What we are beginning to understand is that these young men seem to be trapped inside their own version of war.

THE ANCHOR

John Curtis wasn't at war.

DR. BURKHAULTER

I think he was. And for people inside a war culture, all norms and rules go away.

THE ANCHOR

Okay. Hang on. You mean a war culture like what is described in *All Quiet on the Western Front*?

DR. BURKHAULTER

(nodding)

In a way, yes. Those novels are about the collapse of humanity. By the end, John Curtis' humanity had collapsed.

THE ANCHOR

Hmm. Is that really a fair comparison? The protagonists in these war novels are living under terrible conditions, just trying to survive/

DR. BURKHAULTER

What's fair?

THE ANCHOR

Well, obviously we have to/

DR. BURKHAULTER

Is it your job to define fair? Is it mine?

Pause.

For reasons we don't understand, inside John Curtis there was a war. And it was terrible. We can imagine that he too was just trying to survive.

THE ANCHOR

And yet somehow he went to school. To his part-time job/

DR. BURKHAULTER

He ate nightly at the family dinner table.

THE ANCHOR

The banality of evil?

DR. BURKHAULTER

That's an interesting supposition.

THE ANCHOR

It's a pretty obvious one, isn't it? A kid who seems normal?

DR. BURKHAULTER

Hannah Arendt's famous phrase is a reference to a Nazi war criminal whose evil was part of a structure: The Third Reich. The critical question for us is: what kind of a structure was John Curtis operating within?

THE ANCHOR

Surely the structure was his family.

DR. BURKHAULTER

More likely it was his school.

THE ANCHOR

His school?

DR. BURKHAULTER

I would argue that the most critical similarity among contemporary school shooters is their daily suffering in high school. In the years after the massacre at Columbine, for example, a wave of testimony surfaced about the level of brutality among and between boys at that school.

THE ANCHOR

So what you're saying is the Columbine school administration tolerated student-on-student violence?

Silence.

I really can't let you off the hook here, Dr. Burkhauler. You brought it up, after all.

DR. BURKHAULTER

(reading)

Let me read a quote from a student who attended Columbine with Klebold and Harris. "They'd call them freaks, weirdos, faggots. They were hated. And so they hated back."

THE ANCHOR

Yes, but/

DR. BURKHAULTER

In American public schools, boys learn that violence is not only an acceptable form of conflict resolution, but one that is admired. Half of all teenage boys get into a physical fight each year.

THE ANCHOR

Okay. You make a compelling point, certainly. But I still need to clarify something: you're saying that the atmosphere of the shooter's home doesn't matter?

DR. BURKHAULTER

Again, I think you want me to say that it was the parents' fault.

THE ANCHOR

I understand your hesitancy, Dr. Burkhauler. But there has to be some explanation beyond school bullies.

DR. BURKHAULTER

Why?

THE ANCHOR

Why? Because this kind of monstrous act didn't come out of nowhere.

DR. BURKHAULTER

I think, Ms. Bakker-Shaw, that this conversation is really about something else.

THE ANCHOR

I don't follow you.

DR. BURKHAULTER

We're not talking about John Curtis, or his family life, or even cause and effect.

THE ANCHOR

Okay. Then what *are* we talking about?

DR. BURKHAULTER

We're talking about you.

THE ANCHOR

I beg your pardon?

DR. BURKHAULTER

We're talking about your deeply human, deeply personal need to find a villain. Because, if there's nothing or no one to blame, then (*gesturing out toward the cameras*) none of us are safe. Especially you, the mother of two sons.

THE ANCHOR

We'll return after these messages.
(*in a low but furious tone*)
How dare you bring up my sons.

DR. BURKHAULTER

You're the one who mentioned the fact that you have two sons.

THE ANCHOR

You're out of line.

DR. BURKHAULTER

Let me understand. *You're* allowed to bring up your own sons in order to soften up the television audience, you know, to get their sympathy right before you proceed to blind side that poor woman . . .

THE ANCHOR

I didn't blind side/

DR. BURKHAULTER

All in the name of "hard-hitting" journalism/

THE ANCHOR

That's unfair and you know it.

DR. BURKHAULTER

I don't know it. I don't know it at all.

Scene 27 - Playground in Starlight: 6

Playground. Starlight.

THE MOTHER AFTER

It's like people say.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Yes.

THE MOTHER AFTER

In waves.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Yes.

THE MOTHER AFTER

And then, nothing. Maybe for days.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

And then.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Terrible.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

It's natural.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Is it?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Of course.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Except we aren't allowed to show it.

Silence.

Crying is reserved for the victims.

Not fair.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Fair?

THE MOTHER AFTER

We're victims too.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Tell that to Twitter.

THE MOTHER AFTER

**THE MOTHER AFTER
THE MOTHER BEFORE
THE MOTHER AFTER**

We're grieving too.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Are you allowed to grieve for a monster?

THE MOTHER AFTER

He wasn't a monster.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

I know.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Do you?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

THE MOTHER AFTER

When I saw the police chalk outline, when they took us to the room where he died. The shape of his body, the way he must have been lying there. It was so familiar. Just as I had seen him asleep a hundred times. A thousand. And I felt. Comforted.

Pause.

Until I saw the other chalk outlines.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

He made a terrible decision.

THE MOTHER AFTER

How could anyone "decide" to do that? Anyone human?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

He had decided to die.

THE MOTHER AFTER

That's an incredible understatement.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Just a simple truth.

THE MOTHER AFTER

(spoken at the same time as The Mother Before's line) How could you

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(spoken at the same time as The Mother After's line) How could I

THE MOTHER AFTER AND THE MOTHER BEFORE

(to the audience) have missed it?

Scene 28 - Before: 9

A baseball field.

(Crowd noise in background)

BRENDAN'S FATHER

No, we decided to take 19 down to 77.

THE FATHER

Lot faster than it was before the lane expansion.

BRENDAN'S FATHER

The lights still slow you down though.

THE FATHER

Yep.

BRENDAN'S FATHER

Even so, I've always preferred the West Virginia route down to the shore.

THE FATHER

Us too. Years ago the 95 corridor used to be drivable, but not anymore. Gotta travel through the night or it's a parking lot.

BRENDAN'S FATHER

I think my driving-through-the-night days are over.

THE FATHER

I hear you, Dan. *(pause)* But I miss it. Car so quiet. Just the sound of his breathing. *(laughs)* Maybe a little snoring from Jill. And then waking them up just in time to see the first glimpse of the ocean.

Silence.

BRENDAN'S FATHER

They grow up fast, huh?

THE FATHER

(nodding)

They do. *(watching the game)* Brendan looks good out there.

BRENDAN'S FATHER

Nice of you to come out to watch.

THE FATHER

Well, the play offs.

BRENDAN'S FATHER

(gesturing toward the field)

Brendan says the team still misses John.

THE FATHER

Yeah? After all this time?

BRENDAN'S FATHER

No chance he'll ever reconsider?

THE FATHER

Oh, you know. He's just not a sports guy. I wasn't much of an athlete either. More of a fan.

BRENDAN'S FATHER

Well, it's good to see you. Sandy and I miss seeing John around the house.

THE FATHER

Jill said the same thing about Brendan just the other night. We used to feed him, what, two-three times a week?

BRENDAN'S FATHER

(pretends to pull out his wallet)

How much do I owe you?

Laughter. Then quiet.

Seems like they're drifting apart?

THE FATHER

Yeah. We wondered.

BRENDAN'S FATHER

(shrugging)

High school.

THE FATHER

Yep.

Silence.

BRENDAN'S FATHER

(responding to something on the baseball field)

Wow. That Brewer kid can run, huh?

THE FATHER

I'll bet he'll end up being scouted.

BRENDAN'S FATHER

Wouldn't be surprised.

They watch the game.

Scene 29 - Thanatos Diaries: 3

Alone somewhere. Recording on his phone camera.

THE SON

Hello friends. Here we are at Episode Three already! You keep coming back, so you must like what you're seeing, huh? Cool.

Anyway. So my parents are Lutherans? I bring this up for one reason only. Not because I'm into religion. Or not into it. I bring it up here because I notice that Lutherans put a lot of stake in what they call "turning the other cheek."

I'm more of an "eye-for-an-eye" person myself. That's apparently from Exodus and Leviticus? I googled it. I guess the correct translation is something like "one eye for one eye." As in a balanced retaliation. The revenge cannot be worse than the crime.

(very calmly, almost matter of fact)

So that's what I'm planning. A balanced retaliation. The jocks. The coaches. They pretended to like me. And then they turned their backs on me. One by one.

Just call me the punisher of broken oaths.

Scene 30 - A Killer in the Family: 6

A television studio.

THE ANCHOR

I understand that you are an expert on Shakespeare's plays.

THE MOTHER AFTER

I'm a scholar of dramatic literature, including Shakespeare, yes.

THE ANCHOR

At the University of Pittsburgh?

THE MOTHER AFTER

Formerly, yes.

THE ANCHOR

Formerly?

THE MOTHER AFTER

I retired last month.

THE ANCHOR

At the age of 52?

THE MOTHER AFTER

THE ANCHOR

THE MOTHER AFTER

THE ANCHOR

I was going to ask you how this has affected your professional life. Perhaps that's/

THE MOTHER AFTER

It was no longer tenable for me to stand in front of a room full of nineteen-year-olds and offer the Bard's wisdom.

THE ANCHOR

(pause)

Your husband is a physicist at Westinghouse.

THE MOTHER AFTER

He was for many years. He left his position about a year ago.

THE ANCHOR

So how do you make a living?

THE MOTHER AFTER

We don't.

Camera lights off.

Scene 31 - Before: 10

At home.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(entering) John. I didn't hear you come in.

THE SON

(opening refrigerator) I'm looking for a coke?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Oh, sorry. I stopped stocking them in the kitchen. Your dad and I don't drink pop/

THE FATHER

I'll check the garage fridge. *(door opening)*

THE MOTHER BEFORE

I figured dinner in about a half hour. Maybe sit and talk while I get things going?

THE SON

Okay.

THE FATHER

(door closing) Here's your coke. Nice and cold. *(touching his shoulder)* Good to see you, John.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(getting items out of the fridge) I was thinking chicken thighs?

THE SON

Sounds good.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(to Michael) Can you start the grill?

THE FATHER

Yes, but like I told you the last time, the meter's broken on the cylinder so I don't know how much gas is left/

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Can't you just tell by lifting up the can/

THE FATHER

I can't, actually. Like I told you the last time we had this discussion.

Pause.

You want me to go to Lowe's and get a refill?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

No, we'll take our chances. We have the oven as fallback. *(to The Son)* See what exciting dinner-time banter you've been missing, honey?

THE FATHER

How's the roommate situation going?

THE SON

(shrugging) He disappears every Friday morning, reappears Monday.

THE FATHER

So you're not seeing much of him?/

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Did you ask if he wanted to go to the game?

THE SON

He's got, like, this whole group of friends from high school he hangs with.

THE FATHER

And there isn't room for one more?

Silence.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

You know I kind of think that's the best type of roommate to have. You get along okay, but you're not required to be best friends or anything like that. Because that often . . . gets awkward down the line.

THE FATHER

Did you get the tickets yet?

THE SON

I will, dad.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Which game are you going to?

THE FATHER

We were thinking October 20. Family weekend.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(to The Son)
Students get two tickets?

THE SON

That's what the email said.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Well I'm sure/ you'll

THE SON

(to The Father)
You realize what a zoo the Pitt campus is on game days, don't you? Everyone drunk by 9am.

THE FATHER

(shrugging)
It's a Pitt football rite of passage.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(to The Son)
You don't want to go?

THE FATHER

Jill we already talked about it/

THE SON

I want to/

THE MOTHER BEFORE

There are other things you and your father could/

THE SON

I want to go.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

THE FATHER

THE SON

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(to The Father)
Hand me the paprika? *(to The Son)* What's happening in your classes?

THE SON

They're good.

THE FATHER

Keeping up?

THE SON

Yeah.

Silence.

I am, okay?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Tell me one interesting thing from this week.

THE FATHER

Jill, he's not in grammar school/ anymore

THE MOTHER BEFORE

I know, Michael/

THE SON

How about single variable analysis? Or would you prefer a recitation on vector analysis?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(laughing)

Either?

THE SON

I'm just teasing you, mom. I don't want to talk about calculus.

THE FATHER

I do.

THE SON

I like my Greek and Roman mythology course.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Irene Thompson has a great reputation. That course is always full.

THE SON

This week we're reading about various personifications of death.

THE FATHER

Grim Reaper?

THE SON

In ancient Greece he was called Thanatos.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Oh yes. From the *Iliad*.

THE SON

And, uh, Mors was his Roman name. Mors was also the punisher of broken oaths.

THE FATHER

“Punisher of broken oaths.” Now that has a ring to it.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

I don’t think the urge to personify death is strictly Greek or Roman. It’s traceable across all documented cultures, I’m pretty sure.

THE SON

Professor Thompson says it’s a psychological trick?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

How so?

THE SON

She says it’s a way of pretending to ward off the inevitable. You know, dying.

THE FATHER

Pretending?

THE SON

Well, yeah. Like, all people know deep down that they can’t keep death at bay. So they just pretend to ward it off, you know, because that makes them feel better.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

A coping mechanism.

THE SON

Yeah.

THE FATHER

That’s very interesting.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Doesn’t Freud’s theory of the death drive reference Thanatos? (*to herself*) Is that right? I’m might be getting that mixed up.

THE FATHER

I’m not currently one hundred percent on top of my Freud. How about you, John?

THE SON

Not currently.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Ha ha. Hey. Maybe you could write your final paper on the connection between the ancient Greeks' use of Thanatos and Freud's? (*pause*) If you're looking for a topic . . .

THE SON

(*tense*)

Maybe.

Silence.

THE FATHER

What else is going on? Did you go to the student club fair last week?

THE SON

There's a list on line.

THE FATHER

Anything interesting?

THE SON

(*shrugs*)

Pitt Video Club?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

You're interested in videography?

THE SON

Maybe create my own vlog?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

You'd be the producer? Is that what they call it?

THE FATHER

What's the topic?

THE SON

It's just an idea. I might not even/

THE FATHER

Didn't you and Brendan make a vlog in high school?

THE SON

I mean, for ninth grade English.

THE FATHER

I remember it was pretty good. Jill, you/ remember

THE SON

That was just a dumb thing based on our comic book.

THE FATHER

Well obviously you'd be covering more important topics than comic/ books.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Speaking of Brendan, I saw Sandy the other day. She said Brendan is lonely at Oberlin.

THE FATHER

Well it's only a month in/

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Maybe you guys could Skype or something?

THE SON

Mom, Brendan and I are not friends. We haven't been for, like, more than three years. You get that, right?

THE FATHER

I don't get it. And I never did. You cut yourself off from all of your friends/

THE SON

You told the psychologist you wouldn't bring that up again.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

(glancing at The Father)

Yes we did. You're eighteen, you're in college now, you don't have to vet your social life with us.

Silence.

THE FATHER

Your mother's right. *(pause)* I just hate thinking of you alone all the time, John.

THE SON

I'm not alone all the time. I told you guys like a million times I have friends on line.

THE FATHER

Your gamer acquaintances/ are not real friends.

THE SON

It's not just gamers.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Michael.

THE FATHER

(leaving, door opening)

I'll get the grill started.

Scene 32 - After: 3

At home.

THE MOTHER AFTER

(turning phone off/putting phone on receiver cradle) That was Lee. There's nothing to report.

THE FATHER

What?

THE MOTHER AFTER

There's nothing yet. She said the sheriff's office will get back to us later this week.

THE FATHER

If the sheriff's office is finished with it then why aren't they releasing it to us?

THE MOTHER AFTER

Lee warned us before, Michael/

THE FATHER

It's our property.

THE MOTHER AFTER

What are you talking about? It's state's evidence. You know that.

THE FATHER

It's my kid's sketchbook!

THE MOTHER AFTER

All right. All right.

THE FATHER

Don't start in at me with that tone again.

THE MOTHER AFTER

I'm just trying to stay calm.

THE FATHER

Calm?

THE MOTHER AFTER

Michael, I can't go through this again. If I let myself get angry I'm going to lose my/

THE FATHER

You mean like me?

THE MOTHER AFTER

Michael, please. I know this is hard to accept/

THE FATHER

Is that you or your therapist talking now? 'Cause I'd really like to know who I'm in the room with.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Do you want to discuss this or not?

THE FATHER

I want to argue.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Obviously.

THE FATHER

I want to go on a rampage/

THE MOTHER AFTER

Michael please/

THE FATHER

I want to tear this fucking room apart.

THE MOTHER AFTER

THE FATHER

THE MOTHER AFTER

THE FATHER

What did Lee say.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Someone in the Sheriff's office leaked it.

THE FATHER

Of course!

THE MOTHER AFTER

She said, don't look at the internet.

THE FATHER

Or the evening news. Or the paper.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Why are you so angry?

THE FATHER

Are you kidding me?

THE MOTHER AFTER

You knew somebody would leak it. Don't go on-line, for god's sake. I haven't been on-line in four years!

THE FATHER

Right, because the turn-the-other-cheek tactic has worked so well for us.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Why act like this is/

THE FATHER

When I could be acting like you?

THE MOTHER AFTER

That's not what I. You. I'm just trying to/

THE FATHER

When I could go to my meditation group and "Om" my way to bliss/

THE MOTHER AFTER

You sound like an idiot right now, Michael.

THE FATHER

Because I am an idiot/

THE MOTHER AFTER

I'm not going to/

THE FATHER

A cold-hearted idiot scientist who you never should have married in the first place.

THE MOTHER AFTER

What are you talking/

THE FATHER

Bad genes.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Michael.

I've got them, right?
THE FATHER

Don't/
THE MOTHER AFTER

This all came from me, right?
THE FATHER

Stop, Michael.
THE MOTHER AFTER

'Cause I'm cold and objective/
THE FATHER

Please don't/
THE MOTHER AFTER

and lacking poetry.
THE FATHER

You're angry.
THE MOTHER AFTER

I'm this close.
THE FATHER

What are you saying/
THE MOTHER AFTER

I'm this close to figuring it out.
THE FATHER

There's nothing to figure out, Michael!
THE MOTHER AFTER

It's got to have a reason.
THE FATHER

No! It doesn't.
THE MOTHER AFTER

It's got to be somebody's fault.
THE FATHER

THE MOTHER AFTER

(trying to calm him)

No, it does not. That's what I've been trying to say to you for months now.

THE FATHER

In your best therapist tone.

THE MOTHER AFTER

We didn't do anything wrong.

The Father lets out a dismissive, challenging laugh.

WE didn't do it. *He* did.

THE FATHER

Under our care.

THE MOTHER AFTER

This is why you should talk to someone, Michael.

THE FATHER

So I can give in? Let it just wash me away?

THE MOTHER AFTER

Is that what you think *I'm* doing? Michael, it isn't giving in, it's giving up the idea that we can somehow still fix this.

THE FATHER

Fix this? Christ, Jill. I'm not a moron. Give me a break/

THE MOTHER AFTER

Then what? What are you after?

THE FATHER

Cause and effect.

THE MOTHER AFTER

This isn't physics!

THE FATHER

Ok. Let's try it your way.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Mich/

THE FATHER

Not in the stars, Dear Brutus/

THE MOTHER AFTER

Oh, god/

THE FATHER

But in ourselves.

THE MOTHER AFTER

You're being very cruel.

THE FATHER

Actually, come to think of it, I changed my mind. In the final analysis, I think it *is* physics.

THE MOTHER AFTER

(long pause, then with a deep breath, trying to rescue the situation)

Okay?

THE FATHER

The observer effect.

THE MOTHER AFTER

What?

THE FATHER

You.

THE MOTHER AFTER

What?

THE FATHER

All your self-righteous mothering. All your play groups and parenting books and never-ending advice.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Don't/

THE FATHER

The Observer Effect. Don't you see? *You* looked at him so unrelentingly, for so many years, that *you* changed him.

THE MOTHER AFTER

(upset) You don't mean that/

THE FATHER

(pointing at her)

Cause.

THE MOTHER AFTER

(very upset) No/

THE FATHER

(pretending to shoot himself in the head)

And effect.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Michael!

Scene 33 - After: 4

Circle of white light.

THE FATHER

You're out somewhere and you see a little boy. Let's say he's eight years old. He's at the Giant Eagle. With his dad.

He's running up and down the aisles, spinning like a dervish. The father starts off calm. "Slow down." And "Get off the side of the cart before you pull it over." And "Put that back on the shelf you know we don't eat that." But the kid is getting more and more amped up. Like he's feeding on the father's rising adrenaline. Going to one-up him. So pretty soon he actually does pull the cart over. Some yelling. Some grocery picking up. A woman offers to help but gets shewed away. The kid is crying, hanging on to his father's leg. Some finger pointing and quiet threats. After a little bit they move on.

You watch this domestic spectacle play out in public. You pretend to ignore it, like all the other shoppers. But you're watching. You're watching and you're judging. Maybe you smile. "He's a handful." Or maybe you're less generous and you shake your head. "Parenting today." Or "Glad it's not my kid—he'll be a nightmare as a teenager."

You push your cart. You pick a box of crackers off the shelf. Toss it in. Check it off. And all the while, you're thinking about that kid. That dad. All the work to get them through the misdemeanors of childhood. And then the dark forest of adolescence, where sometimes real wolves are lurking. And finally, finally, into the light of adulthood. The reward—when you finally get to sit back and be off duty.

You're out somewhere and you see a little boy.

I wish my son had never been born.

Scene 34 - Before: 11

A city street.

(general street noise)

BRENDAN

(somewhat awkward hug/hand-shaking with The Son)

Long time no see. How ya doin' man?

THE SON

Doin' okay.

BRENDAN

Good to see you.

THE SON

How long you home?

BRENDAN

Just till the 8th. Oberlin has this January term and, uh, First Years have to attend. When does Pitt's spring semester start up?

THE SON

January 6th.

BRENDAN

Ouch.

THE SON

Yeah. You know Pitt. Early start but early finish.

BRENDAN

Yeah, I guess that's a good thing. Get a jump on the summer jobs.

Silence.

How do you like it? You successfully avoiding your mom?

THE SON

Most of my classes are in other buildings.

BRENDAN

Still getting feminist Shakespeare lectures at the dinner table?

THE SON

I work dinner shift at a restaurant. Method to my male madness.

BRENDAN

(laughs)

Good one.

Pause.

So, do you like Pitt?

THE SON

I'm tolerating it.

BRENDAN

What are you studying?

THE SON

Just Gen Ed stuff.

Silence.

BRENDAN

I think I'm going to do the English major. Though I might do the sensible-slash-ambitious thing and double major. Chemistry.

THE SON

Gotta be sensible-slash-ambitious these days. Otherwise you'll end up in the dead wood pile with the rest of us.

Silence.

BRENDAN

Are you going to take art courses?

THE SON

I might. I don't know. My father wants me to go the physics route.

BRENDAN

Making sure the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree?

THE SON

Ha. Listen, I'm gonna be late for work. (*turning to leave*) Great to see you though.

BRENDAN

Oh, yeah. Sure. Great to see you too, John.

THE SON

(*stops and turns around*)

Hey, Brendan.

BRENDAN

Yeah? What's up man.

THE SON

Do you remember that blog about people dying I found. Back in 8th grade?

BRENDAN

Yeah. I remember.

Silence.

Why? Is it still operating?

THE SON

No, I'm. It's. I was just remembering. Had a memory flash. I guess from. Uhh. Seeing you after so long.

Pause.

BRENDAN

You want to get some coffee or something?

THE SON

Hey, that's nice. Yeah. But I have to get to work. So. Maybe later.

BRENDAN

I'll text you?

THE SON

Yeah. Yeah. Sure. Text me.

Scene 35 - After: 5

The Mother After and The Father are sitting on the couch watching television. Lights tightly focused on their faces.

VOICE OF TELEVISION REPORTER

We don't have much confirmed at this point, Jessica.

VOICE OF THE ANCHOR

What can you see? How close are you?

VOICE OF TELEVISION REPORTER

I see dozens, just, literally, uhm, just dozens of police cars and emergency vehicles.

VOICE OF THE ANCHOR

Outside the school?

VOICE OF TELEVISION REPORTER

Lined up on the street. The lawn.

VOICE OF THE ANCHOR

Is this an active situation? What are you seeing?

VOICE OF TELEVISION REPORTER

Students running.

VOICE OF THE ANCHOR

Now?

VOICE OF TELEVISION REPORTER

Two, three minutes ago. About. I'd say. I guess maybe a hundred kids? A hundred or more children came running out/

VOICE OF THE ANCHOR

We have a report just in—sorry Chris—we have a report coming in that the shooter has been killed. Are you hearing gunfire?

VOICE OF TELEVISION REPORTER

Not right now. We did hear what sounded like an exchange of, uhm, I think semi-automatic rounds about, probably, about five minutes ago.

VOICE OF THE ANCHOR

Before the students ran out?

VOICE OF TELEVISION REPORTER

Yes.

VOICE OF THE ANCHOR

Chris, you called them “children?” Is this an elementary school?

VOICE OF TELEVISION REPORTER

Yes.

VOICE OF THE ANCHOR

You can confirm?

VOICE OF TELEVISION REPORTER

Yes.

Scene 36 - After: 6

Attorney office.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Sandy. It's so good to see you.

SANDY

I'm here for Brendan.

THE FATHER

Well, thank you for coming. We want to support Brendan in any way we can. How's Oberlin going, Brendan? You're graduating?

THE MOTHER AFTER

Is that true? We heard that.

BRENDAN

Yes. I took a, uhm, some time off but now I'm on track/

THE MOTHER AFTER

Things are going well?

THE FATHER

Still majoring in Chemistry?

BRENDAN

Yeah.

THE FATHER

That's so good to hear, Brendan/

SANDRA

Ms. Andrews/

ATTORNEY

Call me Lee, please.

SANDY

Lee. Before we go any further. You assure me that this is the legal way to handle it?

ATTORNEY

Yes.

BRENDAN

I can't get in trouble for not giving it to the police earlier?

ATTORNEY

You're not on trial, Brendan. You have a reasonable explanation for why you didn't hand it over earlier.

BRENDAN

I just. I didn't think it mattered. It's not about. (*pause*) That.

SANDY

This isn't going to get leaked, right? (*looking at Brendan*) Brendan has been through enough these past five years. He can't. (*aggressively*) You can't let this get leaked.

ATTORNEY

As the Curtis' attorney I will submit the letter to the sheriff's office. At some point it may become part of a case file. When the civil suits get to court. It should remain confidential. But. (*to Brendan*) Brendan, you know I can't guarantee anything.

BRENDAN

I know.

ATTORNEY

May I have the letter?

BRENDAN

Here it is.

ATTORNEY

(*opening folded piece of paper*)

There's no envelope?

BRENDAN

I threw it away.

ATTORNEY

So no postmark?

SANDY

It arrived in his Oberlin mailbox three days after.

ATTORNEY

Is that right, Brendan?

BRENDAN

Yeah. I was still in a total haze. I opened it, saw the drawing and the note. And I just. I don't know. I went blank.

SANDY

It was all too much. For god's sake.

THE FATHER

Can I look at it?

ATTORNEY

No, Mike, I don't think so.

THE FATHER

Can you at least read it to us?

Silence.

ATTORNEY

It's a drawing of a pair of wings. And below that it says: "I'm dead."

Scene 37 - A Killer in the Family: 7

A television studio.

THE ANCHOR

I have a very hard question for you now, Jill.

THE MOTHER AFTER

(very quietly) Yes.

THE ANCHOR

Many of our viewers this evening have texted during the show to say that I should not have invited you on. That it is an offence to your son's victims.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Yes.

THE ANCHOR

You see their point?

THE MOTHER AFTER

I see that for your viewers my presence poses an impossible equation.

THE ANCHOR

Equation?

THE MOTHER AFTER

That a quiet young man, raised in a respectful and loving home, could do this monstrous thing.

THE ANCHOR

But your son's "Thanatos Diaries." Surely that changes your "equation." That was hardly quiet.

THE MOTHER AFTER

I'd like to read you something:

*Yes! I've resolved the deed to do,
And this the place to do it:*

*This heart I'll rush a dagger through
Though I in hell should rue it!*

*To ease me of this power to think,
That through my bosom raves,
I'll headlong leap from hell's high brink
And wallow in its waves.*

THE ANCHOR

An old poem about suicide?

THE MOTHER AFTER

Written by Abraham Lincoln. When he was in his twenties. Lincoln's youth was shaped by profound depression. So much so that he told a friend he dared not carry a pen knife.

THE ANCHOR

I didn't know that.

THE MOTHER AFTER

How many parents have quiet, sad, melancholy, depressed boys? And how many of them foresee mass murder?

THE ANCHOR

I see.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Do you? (*gesturing toward her pile of notes*) You look at your "data" and you see the development of a psychopath. But those of us who loved Jack were watching a kid struggling to grow up. A kid. Just a kid.

Silence.

THE ANCHOR

Mrs. Curtis, I want to thank you for being with us today. I know how much courage it has taken for you to speak so openly about such a tremendous tragedy.

THE MOTHER AFTER

I have one more thing to say.

THE ANCHOR

Yes?

THE MOTHER AFTER

I am and will always be Jack's mother.

Scene 38 - Bad Moms: 2

BAD MOMS' HALL OF FAME HOST

Ladies and Gentlemen! Step right up! Don't be shy! Welcome to the Bad Moms' Hall of Fame! Please join me for an illuminating slide show tour.

(slide clicking)

Exhibit 1: Medea. She killed her two sons in order to get back at her philandering husband.

(slide clicking)

Exhibit 2: Mary Ann Cotton. She killed eleven of her thirteen children (and three of her husbands) with arsenic. For the insurance money. Way back in the 1840s in merry ol' England!

(slide clicking)

Exhibit 3: Klara Hitler. *(winks)* 'Nuff said?

(slide clicking)

Exhibit 4: Joan Crawford. *(coaching the audience)* Ready? All together now! NO MORE WIRE HANGERS!

(slide clicking)

Exhibit 5: Livia Soprano. She ordered a hit on her own son.

(slide clicking)

Exhibit 6: Lady Tremaine, also known as Cinderella's mom. Oh, all right, she's her step-mother. And a cartoon. But still.

(slide clicking)

Exhibit 7: Mrs. Bates aka Norman's mom. Again, 'nuff said?

(slide clicking)

Exhibit 8: Gaia, Goddess of the Earth. She married her son Uranus and then had him castrated. Ouch!

(slide clicking)

And finally, Exhibit 9, our very own Nancy Lanza. She not only raised a monster, she bought him an arsenal!

Scene 39 - After: 7

At home.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Oh, Michael. I don't know what to say. It's . . .

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Awful.

THE FATHER

My father had it. My Uncle Herb. I'm not surprised.

THE MOTHER AFTER

What's your diagnosis level? Does Macular Degeneration work like that?

THE FATHER

They're saying Late Stage.

THE MOTHER AFTER

You already have vision loss?

THE FATHER

Yes.

THE MOTHER AFTER

You never said anything.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Why didn't you say something?

THE FATHER

It's all relative, isn't it? What rises to the top of the list. (*shaking it off*) Anyway. It came on slowly. Hard to pinpoint, really. I guess I thought the problem with my eyes was part of the grief-related trauma. Along with the headaches and the fatigue. You know?

THE MOTHER AFTER

I'm really sorry Michael.

THE FATHER

It might be years before my sight is entirely gone. Long enough to learn braille. (*smiles*) I always wanted to learn a foreign language?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

His sense of humor is back.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Your sense of humor is back.

THE FATHER

Well. The dark part, anyway.

THE MOTHER AFTER

I've missed you.

THE FATHER

I've missed you too. My sister sends her love.

THE MOTHER AFTER

And Beth? How is *she* doing? Therapy helping?

THE FATHER

You know. Same I guess. Up and down.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Collateral damage.

THE FATHER

(rueful laugh)

She should change her name.

THE MOTHER AFTER

She's always going to be John Curtis' cousin.

Pause.

Lee said you spoke with a divorce attorney.

THE FATHER

It's still okay with you? To use the guy Lee recommended?

THE MOTHER AFTER

It's okay.

THE FATHER

I also met with Dr. Philips. A few times.

THE MOTHER AFTER

I'm glad Michael.

THE FATHER

He's good at getting you to take a step back. Look at things differently. I needed help with that.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Yes.

THE FATHER

Mostly I think I need help with letting go.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Of?

THE FATHER

Of order. Of the expectation of order. That's a challenge for me.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Yes.

THE FATHER

You. Ummm. You have your own. Challenges?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

THE FATHER

THE MOTHER AFTER

THE FATHER

I know you go to the playground in the middle of the night.

Silence.

What are you doing to yourself, Jill?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Now you ask me?

THE MOTHER AFTER

Looking for some peace, Michael.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Just like you.

THE FATHER

In the playground?

THE MOTHER AFTER

It's a place where I can . . .

THE FATHER

I'm listening.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Finally.

THE MOTHER AFTER

It's a place where I can look myself directly in the eye.

THE FATHER

Oh Jill.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Wait. I'm not/ finished.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Finished.

THE FATHER

Ok.

THE MOTHER AFTER

It's a place where I can look myself directly in the eye. Without/ disgust

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Disgust.

THE FATHER

**THE MOTHER AFTER
THE MOTHER BEFORE**

THE FATHER

You hang on to things, Jill.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Hang on?

THE FATHER

(gesturing toward the room)

These photographs. The room is filled with him!

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Buoys.

THE FATHER

They drag me under. I can't breathe surrounded by him like this.

THE MOTHER AFTER

I'm sorry that it's like that.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

For you.

THE MOTHER AFTER

I really am.

Pause.

We had to do this in our own way.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Have to. Have to do this in our own way.

THE FATHER

I hope my letter made sense.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

It hurt like hell/

THE MOTHER AFTER

It made sense.

THE FATHER

I love you, Jill. But here we are, living the life he created for us.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Living?

THE FATHER

You'll always remind me.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

That day.

THE FATHER

And I can't face it every single day any longer. (*deep breath*) Five years.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

And I can?

THE FATHER

I should be stronger.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Oh Michael. Don't/

THE FATHER

I *should*. But I guess I'm/ not.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Not. And you never were.

THE FATHER

All the pain. It just keeps on flowing.

THE MOTHER AFTER

I feel it too. Every morning/

THE MOTHER BEFORE

Every morning's first flit of consciousness. When I say to myself, "Something's wrong. What is it?"

Silence.

THE FATHER

I have something for you.

Pulls an item wrapped in tissue paper out of his bag.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

My ceramic heart.

THE MOTHER AFTER

You fixed it.

THE MOTHER BEFORE and THE MOTHER AFTER

Oh, Jack.

THE MOTHER AFTER

Thank you, Michael.

THE FATHER

I can't go on loving him, Jill.

THE MOTHER AFTER

And I can't stop.

Scene 40 - Thanatos Diaries: 4

Alone somewhere. Recording on his phone camera.

The Mother After appears onstage and watches the son's recording projected on to a large screen.

THE SON

(with confidence)

I'll start by saying hi. *(waving)* John Curtis here.

That's my actual name, by the way. Been keeping that on the down-low, for obvious reasons.

(confidently, with a positive air)

First up tonight is a little shout out to my mother. She's big into quoting Shakespeare. 'Cause of her job. So, here's one from *The Tempest* for you mom: "Good wombs hath borne bad sons." Or is that "have born?" You find it both ways on-line. Anyway. I'll let you weigh in on that, mom. When the time is right. You're the expert, after all.

So, anyway. It's here. We've arrived at the final episode of the Thanatos Diaries. Eight months on-line. Wow. Time flies.

And this video is to explain. Because if there's one thing I've learned through my research, explanations are in demand.

Everybody is gonna want to know (*exaggerated comic hysteria, pulling at his hair*) "Why, Oh Why, Oh Why!" (*starts to laugh*) Am I right?

Slowly becoming more somber as he talks.

Joking around aside. There's one last thing I need to say.

I'm not crazy. You may not believe that. And, okay, that's fine. Believe whatever you need to believe.

But I am not crazy.

I'm just trying to make things right.

Scene 41 - Playground in Starlight: 7

Playground. Starlight.

I have begun to dream.	THE MOTHER AFTER
Again.	THE MOTHER BEFORE
The nightmares.	THE MOTHER AFTER
Fading.	THE MOTHER BEFORE
Are gone.	THE MOTHER AFTER
Floating.	THE MOTHER BEFORE

The shame. **THE MOTHER AFTER**

Perchance to sleep? **THE MOTHER BEFORE**

Lifting. **THE MOTHER AFTER**

I dream. **THE MOTHER BEFORE**

Of a baby. **THE MOTHER AFTER**

In my arms. **THE MOTHER BEFORE**

Each night **THE MOTHER AFTER**

a baby **THE MOTHER BEFORE**

in my arms. **THE MOTHER AFTER**

A suckling baby. **THE MOTHER BEFORE**

In my arms. **THE MOTHER AFTER**

Each night **THE MOTHER BEFORE**

A suckling babe. **THE MOTHER AFTER**

And no one else **THE MOTHER BEFORE**

in the world **THE MOTHER AFTER**

THE MOTHER BEFORE and THE MOTHER AFTER

but us.

Scene 42 - After: 8

At home.

The MOTHER AFTER and The MOTHER BEFORE are quietly working together. They remove framed photographs, dozens and dozens of them, hanging all over the stage on wires strung from the fly space above. They wrap the photographs in newspaper, and place them in boxes. This takes a while.

Scene 43 - Flash

THE FATHER

(running across the stage as in Scene 2) No, no, no, no. Jill, it's me. Pick up! It's me. I think it was Jack. At the high school! Pick up the phone, Jill. It's me, it's me! Oh my god! Oh my god I think it was Jack.

Scene 44 - Before: 12

At home.

THE SON

Mommy, I made you a castle! Look! See! I made the gun into a castle just like you wanted.

THE MOTHER BEFORE

You did such a good job!

THE SON

Are you happy now, mommy?

THE MOTHER BEFORE

I am. I am very *very* happy.

(She grabs him by the tummy.) Tummy tickle!

He giggles.

My sweet sweet sweet giggly boy.

They both giggle and cuddle.

While this scene plays out, The MOTHER AFTER emerges from the back of the stage and walks into the light.

She is wearing a set of beautiful white wings.

She slowly takes flight.

THE END