

(The Howards' living room. The TV is on, but only static plays. All the curtains are closed. Gail does her best to appear respectable, but there is a crazy look in her eyes. She is fragile. Almost unaware that she is being recorded. Gail is seen on all three screens.)

GAIL HOWARDS. They all blame me. Every last one of them looks at me like it's my fault. As if I told him to do it. As if I never gave him any guidance. As if I wanted this!

SHEYLA. I'm not blaming you for anything. I'm trying to give you a chance to explain your side of this. That's all.

GAIL HOWARDS. He was my little boy once. He was my little boy who had a sweet smile. God, did he have a sweet smile. We were a happy family. My husband left when Herman was eight, Julia was five. She stayed the same, but Herman, something happened to Herman. He'll tell you that's not the truth, but it is.

SHEYLA. Who will?

GAIL HOWARDS. Frank. He'll tell you Herman was happy and nothing was wrong, but it was. Herman's whole concept of the world was ripped away from him when he was eight years old. But it's not my fault. I didn't leave. Frank and I had a decent sex life. (She nods vigorously.) It was good.

SHEYLA. Immediately after the incident, you were quoted as saying: "Herman is a happy, healthy, teenager with a promising future. I can't understand why he would do such a thing." It seems you've changed your mind. Have you?

GAIL HOWARDS. I said that because I had to. Legally, I had to.

SHEYLA. Legally?

GAIL HOWARDS. I talked to my lawyer before the news people got to my house. I'm not some bumpkin who allows herself to become bankrupt from twenty-nine lawsuits. You think I'm a cold woman. That I don't care about what happened to those children. No one understands until they're put in this position. Look, I'm not a doctor. My official statement is that I don't know why he did it. All I know is one minute he's happy, the next minute he's depressed, the next minute I'm asking

my friend about a doctor, you know what kind, and before I blink, he's gone completely insane. My child. Do you have children?

SHEYLA. No.

GAIL HOWARDS. I didn't think so.

SHEYLA. What do you do for a living now that Frank is gone?

GAIL HOWARDS. I'm assistant head marketing director at Computron's main branch here. Eight years since Frank left.

SHEYLA. You were promoted quickly. Assistant head marketing director at Computron in eight years is impressive.

GAIL HOWARDS. Thank you. I made it my top priority.

SHEYLA. Did Herman give you any clues as to what he might be up to?

GAIL HOWARDS. Nothing.

SHEYLA. Did you monitor his Internet time, keep him from watching R-rated movies? GAIL HOWARDS. If I had forbid those kinds of movies in my house, he would have gone to a friend's house and I would have seen him even less. Same deal with the Internet. If you had a kid, you'd know that.

SHEYLA. So, you knew he was watching extremely violent movies and reading books like *The Anarchist's Cookbook* and *Mein Kampf*?

GAIL HOWARDS. They all watch those kinds of movies. It's not like when you and I were kids.

SHEYLA. I'm not so sure we're from the same generation.

GAIL HOWARDS. I'm sorry. The light is bad in here. Let me open the curtains. (She does.) I apologize for the darkness. I've been keeping them closed because cameramen kept popping up to take a shot. The first time a flash suddenly went off in my bedroom at night, I nearly had a heart attack. Yesterday I threw a frying pan at one of them. I'm

not kidding. (Gail starts to laugh a little. Sheyla joins her for a moment. Gail bursts into sobs. Sheyla goes over to comfort her.) I just want to wake up from this nightmare! When is it going to end? I want to wake up. Wake up, wake up, wake up. Wake up, wake up, wake up.

SHEYLA. I should go.

GAIL HOWARDS. No, don't go. (Pained laugh.) As pathetic as it sounds, I don't have anyone else to talk to. The office told me not to come in because they couldn't afford the press hounding the building, something about their image. Frank won't have anything to do with me. Says it's my fault. My friends can't speak to me because the parents of the victims are their friends as well and, well, there's only one me and fifty of them. You do the math. It's a logical equation. (She laughs to herself.)

SHEYLA. Excuse me?

GAIL HOWARDS. Logical equations for real life scenarios. That's what I do ... That's what I did for a living.

SHEYLA. It sounds interesting.

GAIL HOWARDS. Most of it was bullshit. (Sheyla consults her notes.)

SHEYLA. Do you want to talk about what happened to Julia?

GAIL HOWARDS. She was hit by a car and died when she was nine. What else do you want to know?

SHEYLA. Was Herman home when it happened?

GAIL HOWARDS. I don't think I want to talk to you anymore.

SHEYLA. I'm not suggesting it was your fault.

GAIL HOWARDS. You get out of my house. SHEYLA. There's no need for —

GAIL HOWARDS. Get out! (Sheyla gathers her things.)

SHEYLA. I'm sorry. (She moves to go.)

GAIL HOWARDS. Maybe you can answer a question for me, Ms. Duvall. It's a logical equation I can't seem to crack. (Sheyla turns to her.) If you take one woman living in the middle of America, break her family apart, force her to work harder to get ahead in her career than any man would, force her to live with the knowledge that her daughter was killed while she was at WORK, trying to make money to pay for food; then have her son lose his mind and ... massacre forty-two people ... massacre children ... make sure nobody talks to her, nobody listens to her side; then fire her ... In an equation like that, how long would it be before she goes completely insane, all alone in here? All alone in here.