

Thoughts and Prayers

Written by

J.E. Clarke

**INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY**

SENATOR FAIRCHILD (50s, designer suit) orates from a podium, eyes moist. A crowd of REPORTERS hang on every word.

FAIRCHILD

Thoughts and prayers are what our nation needs now. In tragic times such as this, we *must* unite. Evil and those who profit from its fruits...

Fairchild shoots a look at an unseen someone to his left. His voice warbles with conviction. Classic politician move.

FAIRCHILD

Exploit troubled times to point fingers and deflect from what's at stake. I implore all of us to go home and hug your children. Because we must find the strength now to stand for the values we share: love of Family. Country. Faith. And the courage to defend them. Now, more than ever, no-one dare infringe on that God-given right!

Camera lights sweep. Flashes pop. From another podium, SENATOR SPATER (40s) interrupts.

SPATER

If anyone's deflecting, it's you Senator Fairchild! You 'love' the country so much you let it be flooded with assault weapons?

FAIRCHILD

(sniffs)

Assault weapons? Ladies and gentlemen, Senator Spater betrays his ignorance. Anyone trained in firearms knows there's no such term.

SPATER

What you call it doesn't matter. The damage such weapons wreak on human bodies *does*.

FAIRCHILD

Guns don't shoot themselves! A madman murdered those precious souls.

(MORE)

FAIRCHILD (cont'd)

You want to discuss mental health and a decaying society which lets such creatures roam the streets, then I'm here. That's a heart to heart long overdue.

SPATER

That 'madman' wouldn't have gotten as far as he did if your obstructionist actions hadn't kept him armed!

Fairchild points a shaking finger in Spater's face.

FAIRCHILD

This is exactly what I warned of. You use children to push an agenda! YOUR party coddles criminals, it's insane drive defunds heroes of law enforcement who would keep them safe! Deny it all you like, good guys with guns work!

(to the crowd)

Listen carefully to Senator Spater's talk of 'gun control'. People control's what he seeks - taking away your Constitutional right to defend your family! When you vote this November, common sense *will* be on the ballot: single entrance buildings and metal detectors mandatory for all schools. As part of my responsible three part policy....

SPATER

You - responsible? Look!

Spater grabs Fairchild's wrist - flips the palm upwards.

SPATER

Twenty children died yesterday. Their blood is on YOUR hands!

A top notch soundbite. The crowd goes nuts.

Fairchild pulls away from Spater - balls a fist. But...

TECH EMILY (18) intervenes. Slim in jeans and school jacket, headphones over gelled hair - Emily's waifish look screams "political intern that's already seen some crazy shit."

Emily slips between the men. Whispers so only they can hear:

EMILY

(to Spater)

Senator, watch the optics. No touching allowed.

(to Fairchild)

Wait til you've got the press release. Wrap this bad boy up. NOW.

The politicians retreat to their podiums. Exchange stink eyes, then pivot and address the crowd.

FAIRCHILD

That outburst is a perfect demonstration of Senator Spater's inability to guide us sensibly. We need mature leadership, not temper tantrums. In November, vote for that!

He scoops up his notes. Spater clears his throat.

SPATER

I apologize to Senator Fairchild for my actions. But what we NEED now is outrage. And willingness to act!

He turns to leave, almost in unison with Fairchild.

One REPORTER screams over an avalanche of questions.

REPORTER

Senator Spater - does that mean you're prepared to recommend the President issue an executive order banning assault weapons?

FAIRCHILD

As I said, there's no such -

SPATER

(hesitates)

Well, that's up to our Commander in Chief. Such action is better achieved through legislation.

REPORTER

What about the nuclear option on the filibuster? Before the mid-terms, while you've got a majority vote?

Spater points at Fairchild. Flashes a half-hearted smile.

SPATER

Anti-democratic tactics are HIS party's style.

(MORE)

SPATER (cont'd)  
When they go low, we go high. This  
November is the most important  
election of our lives. The people  
need to vote demagogues like  
Fairchild out!

Emily grabs both Senators' arms, hisses:

EMILY  
Screw the questions. You've got a  
meet and greet in five!

She pulls them both through the back stage curtain.

Reporters continue shouting. The Senators smile, wave. But  
after the curtain falls, the muffled words blur.

#### **INT. BACKSTAGE BEHIND THE AUDITORIUM**

Emily descends stairs. Fairchild waves graciously to Spater.

FAIRCHILD  
Rookies over Demagogues. You first.

Spater chuckles as he bounds down.

SPATER  
Tonight you were on fire. "Insane  
drive to defund heroes in law  
enforcement." A pastor couldn't write  
such flowery prose.

FAIRCHILD  
I trained to be a minister. And you  
know I speak truth. "Defund the  
police" is radical insanity!

SPATER  
Yeah, yeah. We think it's bullshit,  
too! Nice pivot to "get out the  
vote", though.

FAIRCHILD  
Credit where it's due. You too!

They reach the ground floor. Emily leads the men towards a  
door. Though something's bugging Fairchild...

FAIRCHILD  
Er, you don't look like Susan.

He stares at her jacket. Her name tag reads: "Emily Feldman".

FAIRCHILD

Emily. To what do I owe the pleasure,  
dear?

SPATER

(snorts)

Staring at a woman's breasts? Gosh  
Ted, that's so unlike you.

Fairchild recoils at the insinuation.

FAIRCHILD

Jim, remember that Christmas party?  
If anyone's vulnerable to be  
MeTooed -

Emily clears her throat. The men look down at her, contrite.

EMILY

Clearly I'm *not* Susan. She had a...  
death in the family. And the  
protestors outside are a security  
risk, so it's best we take a  
different route.

She points at a door, leads them through. Into a maze of:

#### **INT. HALLWAYS**

A few work-info posters, white paint. A warehouse, back-  
stage look. Fairchild grunts at the decor.

FAIRCHILD

I've been in better places.

EMILY

But not more secure.

FAIRCHILD

(chuckles)

Child, I'm a US Senator. I know  
Secret Service agents by first name.

EMILY

As long we get where we're going...  
cool.

She leads them through corridors. Lots of twists and turns.  
Spater glances at his Ulysses Nardin watch, frowns.

SPATER

Who scheduled this shin-dig?

EMILY

It was last minute. One on one with  
parents of the victims.

FAIRCHILD

Oh dear heavens! That's too soon.

EMILY

The schedule got pushed forward.  
After the... death count rose to 25.

SPATER

Twenty five? Jesus Christ!

FAIRCHILD

(glares)

Don't take the Lord's name in vain.  
You're not on stage. So spare the  
outrage, tone it down.

Spater shoots Fairchild a look. Until his stomach growls.  
Causing the Congressman to jump:

SPATER

Reservations!

Emily keeps walking. So polished, she doesn't miss a step.

EMILY

Reservations? We all have those,  
don't we?

SPATER

No - reservations for lunch. The  
Senator and I are booked for Tabard  
Inn at 1PM.

EMILY

What's more important, gentleman:  
Tragedy or Tapas? Take your pick.

They reach a turn. Spater stops, eyebrow raised.

SPATER

That's mighty snarky for an intern.

Emily 180s. Flashes innocent eyes at Spater, shrugs.

EMILY

If my momma taught me anything, it's  
whatever life throws at you, "direct"  
and "efficient" wins. It got me top  
grades at school. That's what gets  
things done, no?

FAIRCHILD

Sweetie, shoot me your resume.  
There's an opening in my office. I  
like your style.

Spater eye rolls: "Seriously?" Emily blushes, looks down.

EMILY

Senator, thank you. If things had  
worked out differently. But now...  
life plans have changed.

She continues walking. Another turn.

Spater's stomach grumbles. The sound bounces off  
increasingly bare, non-descript walls.

Fairchild laughs and leans towards his colleague:

FAIRCHILD

Optics, remember? We can't leave  
parents hanging. No reason we can't  
pow-wow later over drinks.

Emily quickens her pace. The men struggle to keep up. She's  
got youth on her side.

EMILY

Drinks? You guys are friends? It  
didn't look like that onstage.

SPATER

It wasn't an act, if that's what  
you're implying.  
(glares at Fairchild)  
This guy... really pissed me off.

FAIRCHILD

No - not friends... But coworkers? In  
DC, you've got to go along to get  
along. Like everything in life,  
pragmatism gets results.

Emily nods. Keeps walking, doesn't turn around.

EMILY

Columbine happened before I was born.  
How far has pragmatism got us since?

Fairchild's face sours.



FAIRCHILD

Honey, idealism might LOOK nice at your age, But that's not how this town works. Perhaps offering you a position was jumping the gun a bit.

Spater guffaws, elbows the elder man's ribs.

SPATER

"Gun"? Senator, interesting choice of words. And she's on my side. I win!

Another turn. A sly smile flickers on Emily's lips.

EMILY

Senator Spater, you've been in office ten years. Just long enough for Sandy Hook. Since you've got experience-

FAIRCHILD

Something you don't, little girl!

EMILY

Please tell me: what should a leader do when lives are being destroyed? How does lunch at Tabard help?

SPATER

It's not like I want to see this happening. But -

EMILY

But *what*, Senator?

SPATER

(beat)

What's with the 20 questions?

EMILY

Twenty five now. I just want to know.

Another turn. Spater falls in beside Emily, annoyed.

SPATER

Congrats, you're an activist. The rest of us live in the real world!

EMILY

We try, that's for sure.

SPATER

A world fueled by compromise! You might not want to hear such ugly truths, but if you're gonna dish it out, eat some yourself!

Spater looks around, irritation rising.

SPATER

We've been walking forever. Does this tunnel ever end?

Emily smirks. A bemused, sly and subtle look.

EMILY

What a perfect metaphor for gun violence. Arguing - yet achieving nothing - in an infinite loop.

They reach a dead end. And a DOOR. It's surrounded by strangely pristine, white walls. Emily stops.

EMILY

Gentlemen, we've arrived.

Spater stares at the intern, irked.

SPATER

THIS is the venue?

EMILY

Safe from press or protestors. I doubt it'll take long.

She presses her hand against a smooth metal plate. The door slides open, no sound at all. The Senators exchange looks.

FAIRCHILD

That's some sweet technology.

SPATER

In this shit-hole. I'm impressed.

Led by Emily, the three step into...

#### **INT. SECLUDED ROOM**

The entire entrance side's a stage. A CURTAIN blocks the rest of the view.

Emily plucks lint off their suits, points to the curtain.

EMILY

The parents are over there. Just -  
feel their pain for awhile. You're  
politicians. You know what to do.

The curtain retracts, revealing: a sea of angry faces.

Each PARENT silently holds a picture of their lost child,  
names written underneath.

Along with dates/names of shootings. Not just the latest:

Columbine, Sandy Hook, VA Tech, Parkland, Ulvade. More.

Rifles hang off several backs. Senator Fairchild soaks that  
detail in. He whirls on Emily, eyes wide:

FAIRCHILD

Safe? These people are *armed*!

Emily shrugs, innocence personified.

EMILY

Good guys with guns. That's what you  
wanted, right?

She heads for the door.

The crowd inches towards the stage. Fairchild and Spater  
exchange scared looks.

Parents climb up, approach the Senators. One targets  
Fairchild:

Holding the picture of a young pre-teen GIRL. A perfect  
match for Emily. The name below that: Emily Feldman.

Spater and Fairchild freak, sprint for the door.

Two parents melt from the shadows, block the exit. AR-15s  
level at the Senator's chests.

SPATER

(screams to Emily)

What is this? What do you want us to  
do?!?

Emily shrugs, steps out.

EMILY

It's what they want. Justice. Try the  
usual - compromise. But don't bother  
looking for another way out. This  
room is single exit.

(MORE)

EMILY (cont'd)  
(to Fairchild)  
A "common sense security measure"  
Just like you recommend.

The door slides shut on her smiling face.

Behind the Senators, the crowd ROARS. And lunges.

**INT. HALLWAYS**

Emily walks away briskly. With every step, her image flickers - morphing into:

One KID. ANOTHER. Too many faces and lost lives to count.

Behind her, Fairchild and Spater shriek in agony. Lord knows what's happening to them now.

EMILY  
(with varying voices)  
Welcome to the United States of  
Karma, Gentlemen. Thoughts and  
prayers.

With those words, she fades away. The door does, too.

FINAL FADEOUT: