

SURVIVING HEMINGWAY

By

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NARRATOR

Int. DORIS'S HOUSE, kitchen
A square, tidy house as one finds all through rural America; this one has been decorated by someone not afraid of color. TV on the counter drones out the latest war news, "An estimated 30,000 displaced persons seek refuge from the civil wars that..."

DORIS SHELDON, a fit 60-something, in a brightly-colored, flowing, flowered DRESS with SCARF to match in her hair, slices an apple. KNIFE slips. She nicks her finger. BLOOD. She flips the faucet on full blast. Shoves her finger under the running water.

DORIS

Hallelujah, a sharp knife.

KNOCK KNOCK

ANTIQUÉ DEALER

That's all of 'em.

DORIS

Good luck with them.

ANTIQUÉ DEALER

Which ones did Hemingway--?

DORIS

--They were my husband's.

ANTIQUÉ DEALER

But Hemingway--

DORIS

--I wasn't married to Hemingway.

ANTIQUÉ DEALER

Yeah, but Walter was with Hemingway when--

DORIS

--Sounds like the start of a good story. Good luck with them.

NARRATOR

Jaw set, lips tight, DORIS, unseeing, stares out the window at the HOOD of the truck in the driveway. As ANTIQUÉ DEALER drives away we see that the back is filled with MOUNTED EXOTIC BIG GAME ANIMAL HEADS: gazelle, zebra,
(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

etc. On the very top of the pile: the king of the jungle, the LION. DORIS never takes her eyes from the LION HEAD as a TEAR slips down her cheek.

DORIS

Hallelujah. A sharp knife.

NARRATOR

The ANIMAL HEADS, in the truck, travel down the street. They pass the quaint, white, steepled CHURCH. For Sale sign on lawn. Then the obsolete, abandoned shirt FACTORY. Down a well-weathered Main Street. The on-the-National-Registry-of-Historic-Buildings TOWN HALL needs paint. Through the BLINKING YELLOW TRAFFIC LIGHT. They pass a RENTAL CAR that has come to a complete stop under the light which flashes: Caution. Caution. Caution. Behind the wheel, LINDA OSBORN, 40's, in a black, tailored suit, stares unseeing straight ahead out the window as if she's seen a ghost. EARL OSBORN, her recently estranged husband, seated beside her, looks questioningly at her. In the back seat, their 20-something daughter, SERENA OSBORN in a black, gauzy, gypsy get-up glances up.

SERENA

Mom...?

LINDA appears to not hear her daughter. EARL and SERENA exchange a look.

EARL

Linda...? It's yellow.

LINDA snaps to attention. Plasters on a smile.

LINDA

I'm fine.

EARL

Red means stop--

LINDA

--I'm fine--

EARL

--unless you're a bull.

NARRATOR

LINDA drives on.

SERENA

This town's perfect to raise a family.

LINDA

Watch your grammar. The syntax of "perfect" and "family" don't agree.

SERENA

You are such an English professor.

EARL

I thought it was a funny line.

NARRATOR

They pass the FUNERAL HOME, the parking lot full. They park beside other cars on the quiet, tree-lined street. SERENA hops out. Stretches.

LINDA looks down at the pale skin of her ring finger.

NARRATOR (cont'd)

LINDA opens her HANDBAG. Takes out WEDDING RING. Slips it on.

EARL

Oh, yeah...

He hunts for his ring in his pocket.

LINDA

Thanks.

NARRATOR

INT. FUNERAL HOME, vestibule
Somber ORGAN MUSIC.

JASON, 20-something, assistant to funeral director, quietly answers a GUEST's question as LINDA and SERENA enter.

JASON and SERENA make eye contact. Smile shyly at each other.

JASON

Family?

LINDA

No.

SERENA

Yes.

LINDA

I don't know why I said that.

SERENA

I do.

NARRATOR

DORIS's voice soars into the vestibule.

LINDA stiffens.

DORIS (O.S.)

...He sits down in his easy chair. The one I gave him for Christmas. Says, "I'll never let the grass get that long again." Truer words were never spoken.

NARRATOR

Main viewing room. In casket: WALTER SHELDON, handsome, elderly man. Beside him on a stand: large framed PHOTO of younger Walter, Ernest Hemingway, and hunting dogs. Walter is the "gun-boy." On the other side of the room, in the middle of a circle of FRIENDS is DORIS, her left hand bandaged in the SCARF.

DORIS

I thought he was taking a little rest. Turns out it was the long one. Wish he'd told me where he put the car keys.

NARRATOR

Across the room LINDA and DORIS make eye contact.
All the air and SOUND drains from the room.

BEAT

NARRATOR (cont'd)

DORIS's eyes flicker over her daughter's face to EARL who's entered the room behind Linda.
DORIS smiles at EARL. Flings arms wide open.

DORIS

Earl! What a delight! You look so good in that suit.

EARL

Weddings...Funerals...all the special family events.

DORIS

Someday I want to see your cute butt in jeans. Or less.

NARRATOR

BRUCE, funeral director, same age, haircut, aftershave as Earl, in the doorway, watches DORIS playfully pat Earl's butt. He agrees with Doris's assessment of its cuteness.

EARL notices Bruce's look of approval.

BRUCE, embarrassed to be caught looking.

EARL drops his hand, protectively, on Linda's shoulder.

BRUCE looks down, disappointed.

LINDA looks up at EARL. She expects to see his understanding support, but he's flirtatiously smiling at Bruce's obvious disappointment.

LINDA shakes off Earl's hand.

LINDA makes her way to the CASKET.

She regards her father in his repose. The love and respect she has for him is obvious in her every action.

She leans over to KISS his cheek.

WHISPERS a farewell in his ear.

In the vestibule, SERENA and JASON flirt by the guest book.

SERENA

You like this job?

JASON

I have a morbid sense of humor.
You in college?

SERENA

I might go back.

JASON

Waitress?

SERENA

Server. I make good money.

DORIS

Look at you, all grown up. You'll be a mother yourself soon.

(MORE)

DORIS (cont'd)

I have no one to blame but myself.
I should of gone to see you more often--

LINDA

--Mother.

NARRATOR

LINDA steps in front of DORIS. Forces her mother to see her. They regard each other like two warring lions come face to face on a narrow jungle path.

LINDA

Mother. I...a...
What happened?

LINDA could be asking about their relationship or about the scarf around Doris's hand, it's hard to tell.

DORIS lightly brushes off Linda's inquiry as she sweeps past.

DORIS

I had the knives sharpened, dear. Walter and his whetstone. 50 years of marriage and never a sharp knife. Takes some getting used to.

NARRATOR

LINDA, speechless, stares at her as DORIS pats Serena's hair.

DORIS

Don't you have beautiful hair.

LINDA

Moth--

DORIS

--Linda, maybe the beautician who did Walter could give your hair some life.

LINDA

(Resignedly)

They're not called beauticians, Mother.

DORIS

Mortician/beautician. Dead head dresser.

LINDA

Mother, I'm serious--

DORIS

--You always are. Not one cent of humor.

LINDA
That's, no sense of humor.

DORIS
Not a penny's worth. Too late to fix now.

NARRATOR
DORIS leads SERENA to the casket.
LINDA, shell-shocked, stares at her
mother's retreating back. EARL joins
LINDA watching Doris.

EARL
Famulus. From the Latin. Originally meant
domestic servants. 17th century the
meaning changed to 'a group of related
people.' We're slaves to the family.

NARRATOR
Ext. FUNERAL HOME
EARL on front steps, takes a deep breath.
Behind his back, the front door to the
funeral home opens. BRUCE steps out. He
offers a packet of cigarettes to EARL.

BRUCE
Coffin nail?

NARRATOR
EARL pounces on the cigarettes. Lights
one.

EARL
I didn't sleep well...

BRUCE
Funerals have that effect.

EARL
Oh, yeah...No...

NARRATOR
He lights a second cigarette, one for
each hand.

EARL
I never sleep well these days.

BRUCE
Mid-life crisis?

EARL
I don't think so...I don't know...

NARRATOR

BRUCE takes one of the lit cigarettes from EARL's hand. Takes a drag.

BRUCE

You enjoy your life?

EARL

I never know what people mean by that.

BRUCE

To enjoy life?

EARL

No. Mid-life.

BRUCE

Advice from a funeral director: Life is what you do, not what you think about doing.

EARL notices the wedding RING. Remembers why he's here.

EARL

I should go back in...

Returns the pack to BRUCE.

BRUCE

Keep them.

EARL

I'm quitting tomorrow.

BRUCE

Tomorrow's going to be a busy day. Everyone has something they're doing tomorrow.

EARL

Tomorrow always holds second chances. Possible reformation. Even redemption.

BRUCE

Or at least a new set of problems.

NARRATOR

MAIN VIEWING ROOM

LINDA joins SERENA and DORIS at the casket.

Serena studies Hemingway PHOTO.

LINDA
Walter's first love.

SERENA
Hemingway?

LINDA
Boxing.

NARRATOR
DORIS and LINDA lock eyes across the
casket.

DORIS
What a delight to have you home.

LINDA flips on "the smile." Perfect mimic of Doris.

LINDA
Yes. What a delight.

NARRATOR
BERT, 70 years of sweetness and poetry,
joins them.

BERT
Walter was a better writer than
Hemingway, over-rated, pompous--

LINDA
--That's not what the critics said.

BERT
"Now in the times of trials--"

DORIS
--Serena, my first beau, Bert.
(Winks)
I hope we're not too old for a second
chance.

BERT
When I read Walter's obit I called Doris.

DORIS
We did lunch that day. What a delight.

SERENA smiles. LINDA blanches at this obvious sexual comment.

LINDA
If you'll excuse me--

DORIS
(To Linda)

--Dear, Walter's body's cold, not mine.

BERT

"The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace..."

NARRATOR

Ext. FUNERAL HOME

LINDA escapes from the drama inside only to come face to face with EARL and BRUCE sharing jokes and cigarettes like truant schoolboys.

EARL, sheepishly, offers LINDA a cigarette.

EARL

Coffin nail?

LINDA

You'll have to quit all over again.

EARL

(Blithely)

A new day, a new set of problems.

NARRATOR

SERENA comes out the door on the arm of BERT, quoting poetry. DORIS steps out with FLORA, her best friend, 68, Spiritualist, in a dress printed with Botticelli's cherubs.

BERT

"...we cannot make our sun stand still,
yet we will make him run."

BRUCE

Internment is at the Sheldon Cemetery on the hour, Ma'am.

LINDA

Sheldon Cemetery?

BRUCE

Mr. Sheldon had the side yard re-zoned.

FLORA

Death is only a crossing over.

DORIS

A crossing over my yard.

FLORA

Death is as essential to life as life itself.

NARRATOR

DRIVEWAY

BRUCE opens the door of the black LIMO behind the HEARSE.

LINDA

My family will follow in our car.

SERENA

I've never ridden in a limo.

DORIS

Plenty of room. There's a bar...

BERT

"At my back I always hear, Time's winged chariot hurrying near; And yonder all before us lie Deserts of vast eternity."

DORIS

--Earl, Scotch for you?

EARL

That sounds great.

NARRATOR

11 year old LINDA at the curb watches the family drive off. Inside the limo DORIS, glass in hand, stares blankly out the window.

DORIS

When is she going to grow up?

NARRATOR

LINDA drives rental car. Stares blankly out the window.

LINDA

When is she going to grow up?

NARRATOR

They drive down a rural road. Past a Huge BLACK BULL, brass nose ring, alone in pasture.

Ext. Doris's house

Last house on the road. Small, square house. Large yard. Fields and woods stretch out behind. Two doghouses with

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

dogs, CHAMP and TOPO.
Big Cadillac in the middle of the
driveway blocks all other cars and the
hearse.

WHITE MARBLE TOMB towers over the empty
side yard. Almost as tall as the house.
"SHELDON" engraved across top. Expensive.
Ostentatious. One side waits for its new
occupant. The other side is occupied by a
GOAT calmly chewing grass.

HEARSE backs up to grave to unload.
JASON and BRUCE have the CASKET half way
out of the hearse when the LIMO pulls up.
DORIS, flapping arms and flowing dress,
flies out of the limo straight to the
hearse. Surprised looks all around.
DORIS throws herself between the casket
and the open grave. SERENA runs to her
grandmother's side.

DORIS

Wrong! Wrong!

SERENA

Grandma! Be careful.

DOGS BARK.

DORIS

This is my side.

BRUCE

We prepared the site as you specified--

DORIS

(Hisses in his face)

--For almost 50 years I shared his bed.
He lay on the LEFT side.

Dogs HOWL.

BRUCE

This is the left side.

LINDA

(Voice low, controlled)

Mother. According to how one faces--

DORIS

--Graves are always from the occupant's
point of view. Everyone knows that.

LINDA

It doesn't matter which side.

DORIS

In life you only get one funeral. I'm doing it the right way.

Dogs BAY.

NARRATOR

SERENA turns tear-filled, reproachful eyes on LINDA.

LINDA

Okay. We'll have the service now. The burial will be--

DORIS lunges into a you're-giving-me-a-heart-attack routine. The panting. The clutching the throat.

DORIS

--Go! Don't stay. Go, catch your plane.

SERENA

(To Linda)

Stop it! See what you're doing?!

LINDA pulls up short as if SERENA slapped her.

NARRATOR

DORIS, teeters on the edge of the open grave. EARL lurches for Doris's arm to keep her from falling into the hole.

DORIS

(Clutching her chest)

If I have to live...

(Gasp, gasp)

...with this thing on my lawn...he'll be on the right side...the LEFT.

LINDA begins to LAUGH hysterically. SERENA glares at her.

SERENA

You're killing her...

BRUCE

I'll call the backhoe.

The service will be delayed...

NARRATOR

BRUCE and EARL, mirroring each other, dial cell phones.

EARL speaks loud enough that BRUCE can clearly hear.

EARL
I'll change our flights.

NARRATOR
No one notices THE LOOK the two men exchange.

LINDA
Mother. I'm leaving tonight.

SERENA
We won't get a flight out tonight.

LINDA
I'll drive. I'm not tired.

DORIS
I can't find the keys to the car.

LINDA
What?

DORIS
Everyone, come into the house. There's food and drinks.

Linda gives Doris the you-are-crazy look.

SERENA
That's an eight hour drive, Mom.

LINDA
Bagels at the deli for breakfast. My treat.

SERENA gives Linda the you-are-crazy look.

NARRATOR
Leaning on SERENA, DORIS leads the way into the house. FRIENDS follow. JASON, beside casket, wistfully watches SERENA leave.

EARL jollies LINDA out of her bad mood.

EARL
That was quite the show Mother Doris put on. More entertaining every time.

LINDA
(Smiles in spite of herself)
I've missed your jokes.

EARL

Lucky you, you missed them.

LINDA

Earl, I've missed you...

NARRATOR

She offers her hand.

He takes her hand. Kisses it, friendly, dismissive.

EARL

We have an amiable separation. No need to change that.

NARRATOR

EARL fishes out Bruce's cigarettes from his pocket.

LINDA frowns.

LINDA

You can't wait?

EARL regards her for a moment. Puts the pack back.

NARRATOR

Inside the house, FRIENDS mill around. TALK. Drink. LINDA, dazed and alone, wanders from room to room. Drink in hand. She picks up a BOOK from the coffee table. Cover is same photo of Walter, Hemingway, dogs, and gun. TITLE: "THE OLD MAN AND ME by Walter Sheldon." She hugs it to her chest. DOC BONES, 70 year old family medical doctor, interrupts her. His hands are filled with TWO CUPS of coffee from which he alternately sips.

DOC BONES

(Gestures to suit pocket)

Linda, in here. For your mother. Sleeping pills. Grief does odd things to people.

LINDA

I'll see that she gets them.

DOC BONES

This soup tastes like dogs have been swimming in it.

A statement, not a criticism. He continues to sip the coffee.

LINDA

Doc, does my mother have a heart condition?

DOC BONES

Doris never fully recovered from surgery.

LINDA

She had surgery?

DOC BONES

A baby by cesarian in--

LINDA

--Yes, I know about that.

DOC BONES

(Straight faced)

Oh, you were here for that?

LINDA

That was me. Is me. You delivered me--

DOC BONES

--Time flies and butterflies.

I gotta get to the bank before it closes.

(Sticks out his belly)

I'm carrying around too many pounds. I've got to deposit my weight.

NARRATOR

LINDA watches him scurry off. Great.

They're all crazy here.

Linda slips into the empty den. Desperate to be alone. FIRE burns in the fireplace.

On the walls, SHADOW outlines of where mounted animal heads had hung.

She looks out the WINDOW. Something catches her eye. In the side yard, BRUCE and EARL pretend to check out the car.

Their heads, close together, reflected in the car window's glass. BRUCE studies EARL's reflection. Notices THREAD on collar. Both reach for thread. HANDS meet accidentally. Sparks.

EARL

Well...I have...Family obligations...

BRUCE

There's a bar down the road. Tonight's thong night. No. Wet T-shirt.

NARRATOR

Both men watch TRUCK hauling BACKHOE
drive by and park.

EARL

Your man's here.

BRUCE raises an eyebrow at the double meaning of Earl's
comment.

BRUCE

Okay. Later.

NARRATOR

Inside the den, SERENA approaches LINDA
at the window.

SERENA gathers her courage.

SERENA

Mom, I know you're going to throw a fit..
This isn't the best time to bring it up..

(Linda's not listening)

I know you want me to return to college
but I'm older than you were when you gave
birth to me...I don't have time to waste.

LINDA, distracted by scene outside, only hears the last line
about wasting time, i.e. waiting for the funeral service.

LINDA

Won't be much longer.

SERENA

Exactly. I've made up my mind. When
things didn't work out with Joe...well..
I want to start a family.
This isn't easy...is it ever easy to talk
to parents about...sex--

At the word "sex" LINDA turns from the window.

LINDA

--I'm glad you brought it up. I think you
should hear it from me. Your father--

SERENA

--Dad and you...? I don't want to know.

SERENA covers her ears, HUMS loudly.

O.S. SOUND of BACKHOE

NARRATOR

DORIS careens in, paws through drawers of the desk.

DORIS

Where's that key?

NARRATOR

SERENA looks out the window. In the empty side yard GOAT chews grass.

SERENA

Whose goat is that?

LINDA

Mother. It's here somewhere.

DORIS

The goat will keep the old goat warm til I get there. No more heart attacks mowing the goddamn grass. Excuse my language.

LINDA

Mother. You can hire the neighbor's son.

DORIS

Does he eat grass?

NARRATOR

LINDA, stunned, points at the shadows on the wall.

LINDA

You had no right to get rid of his collection. I might have wanted them.

SERENA

You? Animal heads.

NARRATOR

DORIS snatches the BOOK out of LINDA's hands.

DORIS

Goddamn Hemingway. Who cares if Walter took him fishing?

NARRATOR

Doris throws BOOK into the FIRE.
LINDA leaps to the fire.
Tries to haul the singed book out of the flames.

LINDA
Mother! You have no right!

DORIS
Oh, stop being so dramatic. There's boxes
of that stupid book in the attic.

NARRATOR
LINDA turns on her heels and leaves.

DORIS yells after her,

DORIS
When are you going to grow up?

NARRATOR
In the KITCHEN, FLORA organizes the
casseroles and pies on the table. LINDA
pours herself a stiff DRINK.

FLORA raises an eyebrow.

FLORA
Have some chicken; it has tryptophane, a
mood stabilizer. It's calming.

LINDA
I'm fine.

NARRATOR
LINDA stares at DORIS in the next room.
FLORA watches LINDA watch DORIS. Her
voice carries from the other room.

DORIS (O.S.)
He sits down in his Christmas easy chair.
He says, "I'll never let the grass get
that long again."

LINDA
(Aloud, to herself)
When will she grieve?

NARRATOR
JASON wanders in. They don't notice him.

JASON
Have you seen Serena?

NARRATOR
FATHER BOB, hip minister with collar and
beret, pops in.

FATHER BOB

Linda, glad you've found the food. It seems to help in times like these.

LINDA

Tryptofuckingphane.

FATHER BOB raises an eyebrow. Gently adds,

FATHER BOB

Your father now knows heavenly peace.

NARRATOR

JASON looks around. No one sees him even though he's standing in the middle of the room. He scurries away.

LINDA

Virchow wrote, "I have dissected many corpses, but never yet discovered a soul in any of them."

FATHER BOB

Ah, yes. You're a professor now, aren't you? I remember when your dog died. What were you, 10? You asked me if dogs had souls.

LINDA

If dogs don't have souls, can humans?

FATHER BOB

Humans have souls and dogs don't. It's one of God's mysteries.

FLORA

Dogs are intelligent. Aware. So much more human than..well, humans sometimes.

LINDA

In written word 'dog' replaced 'hound' in the 16th century. And yet 'dog' has no known relatives of equal antiquity in other European languages. An etymological mystery. Like family.

FATHER BOB

Exactly. It's a mystery. God's mystery. Your father now knows heavenly peace.

NARRATOR

FATHER BOB wanders out.

LINDA looks down at her wedding RING.

LINDA

Whom am I trying to impress? Mother?
We've been separated for a month. I was
going to tell her when...

FLORA

That's a lot all at once.

LINDA

After the funeral.

NARRATOR

FLORA hands LINDA a plate of food.

FLORA

No chicken.

LINDA, with a small smile, takes the plate.

LINDA

No chicken.

NARRATOR

Bathroom, FLORA's voice over all:
WATER running full blast, DORIS, puffy-
eyed, red-splotched cheeks, hangs over
sink. She's crying hard. DORIS turns off
the water. Looks at herself in the
MIRROR. Water drips from her nose, chin.

FLORA V.O.

No one understands what causes change. It
just happens. Menstruation. Ovulation.
Gestation. Birth leads inevitably to
Death. None of us are going to get out of
this life alive.

NARRATOR

LIVING ROOM, FLORA and SERENA are in the
middle of an intimate party conversation
about the meaning of life.

SERENA

But what about the soul? I believe we all
have a spirit.

FLORA

You really believe that?

SERENA

Well, yeah...You don't...?

FLORA

Hell, no. Open your eyes. Look around you. What do you see? It's obvious.

(She leans closer
Announces)

Some bodies don't have souls.
It's the only logical explanation.

SERENA

Oh, I thought...I mean...I was told you do spirit channeling so I figured you had to believe in there being souls.

FLORA

It helps to believe in the soul if you're going to channel it.

SERENA

Could you teach me?

FLORA

To believe in the soul?

SERENA

No. To channel.

FLORA

It's not something you go to school for.

NARRATOR

BATHROOM, Serena & Flora's voices over all: The PLATE of food on the edge of the sink, WATER running full blast, LINDA, puffy-eyed, face red-splotched, hangs over sink. She's crying hard. She turns off the water. Looks at herself in the MIRROR. Water drips from her nose, chin.

SERENA V.O.

I can't believe that this physical self is all there is to being human.

FLORA V.O.

Ah, yes. The body of flesh and the body of the soul. Through the body one steps outside the body...briefly. I'll give you a hint: Birth/Death. They're the same coin.

SERENA

Maybe later you could show me how to channel...?

NARRATOR

Hall, LINDA steps out of the bathroom. She looks at the PLATE of food still in her hand.

Ext. DORIS'S HOUSE, LINDA takes her PLATE of food to the DOGS. LINDA pensively watches the DOGS wolf down the food.

LINDA

Not even a thank you. Ungrateful curs. I feed you. And what do I get in return? Do you even remember your mother?

NARRATOR

DOGS look up at Linda.

LINDA

(In street/punk voice)

What the fuck do you want from me?! Did I ax for it? Did I fuckin' ax to be born into this shit world?

NARRATOR

SERENA comes around the corner.

She's shocked to hear what her mother is saying.

SERENA

Mom. What did you just say?

LINDA

That's not me, dear. That was the dog speaking.

SERENA

I've never heard you use that language.

LINDA

I can't help the way the dog speaks, dear.

SERENA

You spoke.

LINDA

Pity how the English language is mangled by the uneducated.

NARRATOR

SERENA, a puzzled, concerned look on her face, watches her mother return to the house.

Int. LIVING ROOM, In the same spot and

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)
intensity with which she was talking with
Serena, FLORA continues her discussion
with JASON.

FLORA
What is matter and what is spirit? I
believe boundaries should not be drawn
too definite. Perhaps matter and spirit
are relative modifications of each other.

JASON
Kind of like when Luke switches off his
computer and is guided by the Force?

FLORA regards JASON for a BEAT.

FLORA
I often think that Life is wasted on the
living.

NARRATOR
EXT. SIDE YARD, Dusk, CANDLES have melted
into puddles on the marble. Casket in
grave. FRIENDS stumble home. Family at
grave side.
FATHER BOB strums GUITAR.

FATHER BOB
Kumbaya, my Lord, Kumbaya...

BERT
This world may be a set of symbols for a
higher form of existence or that might be
just a lot of chopped liver.

NARRATOR
BERT wipes a tear away with the back of
his hand.
LINDA takes out of her handbag a tiny box
of pastel colored FACIAL TISSUES.
Before she can offer them to BERT, DORIS
hauls out of her handbag a ROLL of TOILET
PAPER. DORIS rips off long sheets of
paper, hands them out to everyone.

DORIS
When I married Walter I had a bun in the
oven.

LINDA
Mother.

DORIS

That's the one. Most first children round here are born "premature."

Dogs BARK.

SERENA

You were a love child, Mom?

DORIS

Remember: no matter who your father is, you're still your mother's child.

LINDA

Your grandmother is a consummate storyteller. With perfect timing.

NARRATOR

Linda takes Serena's arm, FLORA takes Bert's. They head toward the house.

FLORA

Conflict is a union of sorts.

NARRATOR

DORIS left alone, sags into herself. If LINDA turned and looked back she would see how deeply DORIS is hurting, but she doesn't turn, doesn't see. DORIS holds her grief for a moment.

Then YELLS,

DORIS

Someone make those stupid dogs shut up.

NARRATOR

O.S. Father Bob launches into a rousing guitar version of "Louie Louie." GUITAR MUSIC mixes with BARKING EXT. CUT. Later, SIDE YARD, Night, STREETLIGHT illuminates JASON as he loads FLOWERS into the back of the hearse. SERENA saunters up.

SERENA

Hey, Morbid.

He's delighted to see her but has to act cool.

JASON

Hey.

NARRATOR

She sticks her head inside the hearse.

SERENA

Ummm. Smells good.

JASON

I'll deliver the flowers to nursing homes and hospitals in the morning.

NARRATOR

SERENA shoves the flowers to the edges. Crawls in. Lies down.

JASON

Hey, don't crush the--

SERENA

--Ever done it in here, Morbid?

NARRATOR

She unbuttons her shirt.

JASON looks around to see if anyone's watching.

JASON climbs in beside SERENA. Closes the door.

She pulls him toward her to kiss him.

Before their lips touch her plan is the bare minimum of foreplay, the brief fumble in the dark, the touchdown.

But as soon as their lips touch...Flames. Furnaces. Fireworks. Her plans are swept away along with her body in this intense passion. The first KISS melts her plan. Two bodies meet and mystery of life, two souls join. With great difficulty she surfaces from the depths of the kiss. Panting she rolls away from him. Weakly, holds him back with one hand.

SERENA

Wait...

JASON

What...?

She's regains her equilibrium. Recalls her plan.

SERENA

--Do you want to start a family?

NARRATOR

Jason reaches for the condom in his wallet.

JASON

I'm prepared. I have--

SERENA

--No. No. I do. I'm ovulating.
I want a baby. No strings.

NARRATOR

She slips out of her shirt.

JASON

(Confused)

What...?

SERENA

I don't even want to know your name.

NARRATOR

She hikes up her skirt.

JASON

(Hurt)

You don't want--?

SERENA

--Once. And never see each other again.

NARRATOR

She slips off her panties. Hands them to him.

SERENA

Okay. Come on.

JASON

What do you...?

NARRATOR

A very conflicted JASON looks at panties, leans toward her. She turns her head away.

SERENA

But don't kiss me. I can't...it's too...

NARRATOR

She closes her eyes and thinks of England.

SERENA
I'm ready.

A BEAT

JASON
No.
This is too weird for me.

NARRATOR
JASON climbs out of hearse.

SERENA
Morbid...

JASON
Go find yourself another stiff.

NARRATOR
He SLAMS door shut.

SERENA starts to LAUGH.

SERENA
Another stiff.

NARRATOR
Int. DORIS'S HOUSE, KITCHEN
DORIS makes coffee. LINDA storms in.

LINDA
Okay, Mother. Let me explain something to you. Object constancy. Psychology 101: The Stages of Infant Development, "Objects exist when not in sight." It's why babies love peek-a-boo.

NARRATOR
O.S. BUMPING SOUNDS like chairs and tables being moved in the living room.

DORIS
Peek-a-boo? You want to play peek-a-boo?
(Covers face with hands)
Where'd Linda go?
(Uncovers her face)
Peek-a-boo. There she is.
What a delight to have her home.

LINDA
I can go away again. But the issues will continue to exist, fester, and eat our hearts out.

(MORE)

LINDA (cont'd)
Or we could bury the past and start
again.

DORIS regards LINDA for a BEAT.

DORIS
I suppose you think that's healthier.

Linda throws up her hands in despair.

LINDA
That's it. I'm going home.

NARRATOR
O.S. SOUND of CRASH. SPLINTERING GLASS.
LIVING ROOM
LINDA and DORIS come in to see FLORA
standing over the shattered GLASS CANDLE
HOLDER on the floor.
SERENA has set up a folding table and
chairs for a fortune-telling session. She
lights CANDLES. BERT and EARL are seated.
Everyone has had too much to drink.

EARL
It's about time you got here.

LINDA
It's time to leave.

BERT
"When April's hour calls my name
And all around my--"

SERENA
--We're gonna make contact with Grampa.

DORIS
Oh, good. Ask Walter where he put the
key.

NARRATOR
DORIS eagerly joins the others at the
table. LINDA peeved.

BERT
Walter was a good man.

DORIS
As men go.

LINDA
I'll call you a taxi, Flora.

SERENA

Flora's got to channel Walter's spirit or we'll never find the keys.

LINDA

Serena, we're leaving; you're not helping matters any.

SERENA

Mom, I don't want to help 'matter.' I'm interested in spirit.

NARRATOR

ALL but LINDA, close their eyes, join hands around the table, and follow FLORA's directions.

FLORA

This world we can see and touch is but one world of many.
Close your eyes...Focus your energy...Concentrate. Breathe.
Walter, we'd like you to speak to us...

LINDA

Mother, you don't want to talk to Dad in your present state. He always cast a disparaging eye on your drinking.

DORIS

Walter! Would it have killed you to have left the keys on the table for once?

NARRATOR

LINDA throws up her hands in frustration. She spins on her heels to leave. Suddenly, the CURTAINS are blown by an inexplicable BREEZE. The CANDLES are blown out. A window SLAMS shut.

Everyone's eyes get wide.

BERT GIGGLES.

LINDA rolls her eyes. SERENA deadly serious.

SERENA

Is that you, Grampa? It's Serena.

FLORA

Spirit, speak through me.

NARRATOR

LINDA, disgusted but bemused, watches them close their eyes and try to concentrate again.

BEAT

DORIS breaks the SILENCE.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

(Deep, masculine voice)

Sometimes it's a bullfight, sometimes it's bullshit.

FLORA

Shhh! Quiet, Doris.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

You called me. I'm not a bit afraid. But you are not from a hunting tribe so you are afraid.

SERENA

Is Grampa speaking through her?

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

A man has to do what a man must do. No shame in it.

FLORA

I'm the spirit channel! Doris, you're the grieving widow! You never let me--

SERENA

--Spirit, tell us who you are.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

Death's just a dirty trick. Death's just another whore.

LINDA LAUGHS.

LINDA

I heard Daddy tell that story a hundred times.

EARL

What story?

LINDA

I'm not impressed, Mother.

SERENA

What story?

LINDA

When asked by a reporter what were his feelings about death, supposedly, Hemingway said, "Just another whore."

SERENA

Hemingway? Grandma is channeling Hem--

FLORA

--Channeling my ass. Old biddy's drunk.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

It's been a long time between drinks.

LINDA

Your grandmother's playing a joke on you.

SERENA

Why couldn't Grandma be channeling Hemingway?

FLORA

(Sarcastically)

Yeah. She's Joan of Arc.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

What will you have? A gimlet?

NARRATOR

DORIS/HEMINGWAY stands up. SWAYS slightly as if unsure how to move this body. Or else, as if drunk.

LINDA

Looks more like devil alcohol, not spirit channeling.

NARRATOR

SERENA, BERT, EARL, enthralled by this performance, eagerly follow DORIS/HEMINGWAY as she staggers around the room.

LINDA sits down next to FLORA. They've obviously had enough of this foolishness.

FLORA

She's like an illiterate peasant girl. The sort saints and angels speak through. Perfect to lead her country to war.

NARRATOR

Kitchen, DORIS/HEMINGWAY searches for ALCOHOL. The others follow. The search yields only empty BOTTLES.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

Campari and gin.

BERT

"Drink to me only with thine eyes..."

SERENA

Grandma's acting as if she's possessed.

LINDA

She always has.

FLORA

There's a thin line between being a channel through which a spirit flows and becoming a vessel which a soul possesses--

NARRATOR

DORIS/HEMINGWAY finds a bottle of COOKING WINE. Unscrews cap. LINDA tries to take it away. A tug of war with the open bottle. LINDA wins. Wine splashes on her face.

LINDA

You're impossible--

FLORA

--Nowadays the celestial has less to say. Or maybe it's just we don't hear as well since the invention of the radio, cars, television, sirens...Who invented sirens?

EARL

--There's a bar down the road.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY's face lights up.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

To the bar!

LINDA tosses a look at EARL.

EARL

Well, there is.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

The living waste Life. We do not deserve to live in the world if we do not live in the world--

LINDA

--We just had a funeral.

NARRATOR

DORIS/HEMINGWAY tenderly wipes the wine off Linda's cheek. LINDA is confused and pleased by this show of tenderness from her mother.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

Looking and not seeing is a great sin. We do not deserve to live in the world if we do not see.

NARRATOR

Ext. Road House Night
Low barn-like building. Two dozen trucks and 5 year old "family cars" squat in a pot-holed parking lot.
Sign: Wet T-shirt Contest
BERT, FLORA, SERENA, EARL, LINDA and DORIS/HEMINGWAY make their way to the front door.

LINDA

I really don't think this is a good idea..

NARRATOR

DORIS/HEMINGWAY throws an affectionate arm around Linda's shoulder. Looks at her kindly and with great compassion.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

We've buried the dead. But we must live.

NARRATOR

Inside, COLLEGE KIDS dance and drink.
LOUD MUSIC. Big room. Low stage in front.
Bar in back of room.
FAR END OF BAR
BERT, FLORA, SERENA, EARL, LINDA and DORIS/HEMINGWAY at bar. BARTENDER sets out a line of shot glasses. Fills them.
DORIS/HEMINGWAY downs two before the others finish one.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY
(Grabs Linda)
Let's show 'em how to dance.

NARRATOR
LINDA, embarrassed but pleased, allows herself to be dragged on to the dance floor.
BERT offers SERENA his arm.

BERT
Would you care to dance?

NARRATOR
FLORA and EARL are left alone. They sip their drinks. They observe DORIS/HEMINGWAY whirl and dip the bewildered LINDA across the dance floor.
ext. road house NIGHT
BRUCE leads a reluctant JASON to the front door.

BRUCE
You've got to get back in the saddle.

JASON
Like you're an expert about girls.

BRUCE
Enough lip from you, young man.
Sometimes I really do feel like your father.
Picking up is picking up.

JASON
My mom says the kind of girl I want can't be found in a bar..

NARRATOR
The words aren't even out of his mouth...SERENA dances by on BERT's arm.
FAR END OF BAR
FLORA and EARL watch YOUNG PEOPLE on dance floor.
BRUCE comes up behind EARL, who's lost in thought.

EARL
(To Flora)
Funny how, when you're younger the possibilities seem endless. As you get older, the world simply closes in.

NARRATOR

BRUCE follows EARL's gaze.
DORIS/HEMINGWAY expertly twirls and lifts
LINDA.

BRUCE

And that closing can be mighty expanding.

NARRATOR

DANCE FLOOR
SERENA and BERT finish their dance.
BERT trots back to the others at the bar.
SERENA checks out GUYS.
JASON approaches Serena.

JASON

I...I overreacted.
I...was an altar boy...was gonna be a priest--

SERENA

--Morbid, you're in the way.

NARRATOR

SERENA pushes by JASON.
She taps MALE on the shoulder. Smiles
seductively. SERENA and MALE dance off
together.
JASON dials cellphone.
FAR END OF BAR
BRUCE and EARL pass one cigarette back
and forth between them.
Next to them, FLORA and BERT share a
packet of PEANUTS.
As LINDA drags DORIS/HEMINGWAY from the
dance floor, BERT jumps up to offer his
seat at the bar.

BERT

Food and drink is vital;
dance is essential;
But love, love is celestial.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

(To Bartender)

Sargent, time to review the troops.

NARRATOR

When LINDA appears, EARL tries to look at
ease sitting with BRUCE.
LINDA picks up the cigarette PACK from in
front of the men.
EARL stares at her as she lights up.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

LINDA takes a drag on the cigarette. Her hands shake. She COUGHS.

EARL

You don't smoke.

LINDA

You promised you wouldn't in public. You're supposed to set a good example for our daughter.

NARRATOR

She tosses a significant LOOK at BRUCE. They aren't talking about cigarettes. They both look at SERENA on the dance floor.

LINDA

It's my hometown. Don't embarrass me. Not in front of my family.

NARRATOR

He shoots a glance at DORIS/HEMINGWAY downing another drink.

EARL

Embarrass you?

LINDA

I am not my mother.

EARL grinds his cigarette out.

EARL

Okay. I'm a bumbling idiot. But I'm trying to live my life here.

LINDA grinds her cigarette out.

LINDA

We all are.

EARL

We all stumble over the ones we love...

NARRATOR

Linda's heard enough. She puts up her hand to stop the flow of words as she backs away from the counter. EARL looks down at his hands. He reaches for the cigarette pack. BRUCE leans toward him.

BRUCE
Say that again.

EARL pushes the cigarette pack away.

BRUCE (cont'd)
The part about loving bumbling idiots.

BRUCE smiles meaningfully at EARL.

Slowly, EARL returns the smile.

NARRATOR
FLORA watches EARL and BRUCE leave together. She turns to BERT and DORIS/HEMINGWAY.

FLORA
Opening one's soul to the universe or to another human soul can be accomplished either spiritually or surgically.

NARRATOR
DANCE FLOOR
SERENA dances with new GUY. JASON cuts in.

SERENA
Look, Morbid, I'm not doing like my parents did--

JASON
--You're chickenshit.

NARRATOR
SERENA angrily yanks JASON off the dance floor.
QUIET CORNER
SERENA gets right up in his face. Righteous indignation.

SERENA
Now you listen. I'm not afraid--

JASON
--Then why'd you shut me out?
Why wouldn't you kiss me?
Because you felt something. Our souls touched. Hearts joined. It terrified you. Chickenshit.

He's close. Too close. The smell of his pheromone heavy sweat weakens her knees...knees wobble...her resolve weakens...But she can't admit defeat. Not quite yet.

SERENA

You wish.

JASON

(Issues a challenge)

Kiss me.

SERENA

I don't have to prove anything to you.

JASON

No. You have to prove it to yourself.

SERENA

I...I just want a sperm donor...

NARRATOR

LOUD MUSIC with a driving sexy beat: the wet T-shirt contest.

JASON

You can have one. If you kiss me.

SERENA

(Yells over music,
pretends not to hear him)

What?

JASON

(He knows she heard him)

Let's go.

NARRATOR

ext. road house parking lot night
Far side of lot, BRUCE and EARL slip into
the shadows. EARL shivers. BRUCE puts his
arm around him.

BRUCE

The moon is full.

EARL tips his head up to look at the MOON.

EARL

It's beautiful.

BRUCE

Can I kiss you?

EARL shy. Embarrassed. Pleased.

EARL

I hope so.

NARRATOR

Meanwhile, back inside the road house..

FAR END OF BAR

In the background, the wet T-shirt contest is in full swing. Gyrateing young bodies and dirty dancing.

LINDA, miserable, stares into her drink.

BERT tugs on DORIS/HEMINGWAY's arm.

BERT

Come on, Doris. This is our dance.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

I'm no fairy. I've already told you I don't dance with other men.

NARRATOR

Hemingway remembers how to throw a mean upper cut but Doris's body has no experience even shadow boxing.

The blow meets its target but with the force of an average 70 year old woman. It deflects off.

BERT caught off guard (and off balance) topples over.

In the commotion, the SCARF Doris had wrapped around her hand flutters to the floor. Falls across Bert's face.

LINDA and FLORA jump up.

LINDA

Mother!

FLORA

What're you doing?

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

(To Bert)

I have killed more things than you have made passes at and I tell you to cease and desist in your mealy-mouthed mouthings and leave this country.

NARRATOR

Meanwhile, back outside..

PARKING LOT

The glowing point of light in the shadows. BRUCE and EARL lean against the

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)
building and share a cigarette.
JASON leads SERENA around the corner of
the building, into the shadows.
SERENA notices there is some one else
here.

SERENA
Oh. Excuse me.

NARRATOR
The people turn. SERENA surprised,
confused.

SERENA
Dad?

NARRATOR
As Bruce steps out of the shadows, it
begins to register in her mind...

SERENA
Excuse me.

EARL
Serena. It's not what it looks like..

BRUCE
It's not?

NARRATOR
In her confusion, Serena flees the scene.
EARL follows.
JASON turns on BRUCE.

JASON
Great. Thanks.

BRUCE
No. Thank you.

NARRATOR
Inside the bar, LINDA helps BERT stagger
up from the floor. FLORA picks up the
SCARF.

BERT
That was quite unexpected..

DORIS/HEMINGWAY
(Shadow boxing, Flexing)
I'm out of shape.

FLORA

You're in no shape to be out with decent folk.

LINDA

Mother. Are you doing this to embarrass me?

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

In bullfighting, one deflects with correct form. Avoids with perfect poise. It is the essence of the sport.

NARRATOR

Outside in the parking lot, JASON leans against the hearse. Appears to be talking to himself.

JASON

Parents can be jerks. My father moved out of the country. He has two kids that he does everything with. Everything that he never did with me.

NARRATOR

Back door of hearse opens.

SERENA

Is that supposed to make me feel better?

JASON

Yeah.
Want to get something to eat? I'm starving.

NARRATOR

At the roadside, EARL is engrossed by the activity of his feet scuffing through the gravel at the edge of the road. BRUCE drives up alongside Earl. Winds down his window. Leans out. EARL refuses to look up from his fascinating feet. Keeps walking.

BRUCE

A man taking shingles off his roof ties a rope to the bumper of his car. Climbs to the roof with the rope tied around his waist. Before he can attach the rope to the shingles, his wife comes out of the house and drives away in the car.

EARL

And he broke his neck. Nice cautionary tale.

BRUCE

No. A pile of manure broke his fall. The key question is, was he insured? He wasn't occupying the vehicle but he was attached.

EARL

Is that supposed to make me feel better?

BRUCE

Yeah.
Want to get something to eat? I'm starving.

NARRATOR

LINDA leads DORIS/HEMINGWAY out of bar.
FLORA helps BERT.

BERT

"We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever gods may be
That no life lives for ever;
That dead men rise up never;
That even the weariest river
Wends somewhere safe to sea."

LINDA

Amen. Let's go home.

NARRATOR

LINDA ties SCARF around her own neck.
DORIS/HEMINGWAY opens the car door for LINDA.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

The night is still young. We--

LINDA

--We aren't. It's been a long day.

NARRATOR

In a working class neighborhood,
JASON and SERENA get out of vehicle. She looks around, slightly confused. There's no restaurant in sight.

JASON

My name's Jason Allen Scott. You?

She considers not telling him her real name.

SERENA

Serena Osborn. No middle name.

JASON

No middle name?

SERENA

Yeah. Parents mess you up from the start.

NARRATOR

Front door is flung open by Jason's mother, MOM SCOTT, similar hairdo and outfit to Serena's. SERENA is surprised but pleased to be greeted with a big hug. The two women immediately like each other. They should, their wardrobe and world views are alike.

MOM SCOTT

You're a vegan, right? I have those new soy patties. Can't vouch for what they taste like. Cardboard for all I know...

NARRATOR

MOM SCOTT leads the way into the house. SERENA hangs back.

SERENA

(Whispering)

You told your mom?

MOM SCOTT (O.S.)

...Fried pickles and ice cream for dessert...

SERENA

(Horrorified)

You told your mom.

MOM SCOTT (O.S.)

...Just kidding.

JASON

She's excited. Her first grandchild.

NARRATOR

Ext. pasture night MIST rising. TREE. Huge, black BULL asleep by big rock. Inside car: FLORA drives. BERT SNORES in the front seat. LINDA and DORIS/HEMINGWAY in back seat.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY
Driver, pull over.

LINDA
We're taking you home.

NARRATOR
DORIS/HEMINGWAY leans over the seat.
Grabs the wheel. They struggle over
control of the wheel. FLORA takes her
foot off the gas.
They swerve to the left.
To the right.
Off the road.
Into shallow DITCH.
Up the slight EMBANKMENT.
Plow into barb wire FENCE. This frail
barricade stops them.
BERT doesn't wake. LINDA and FLORA are
shaken but unhurt.
HEADLIGHTS illuminate the field, tree,
rock, and in the center of the picture:
the sleeping BULL.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY
A man must fight as a man no matter what
the odds. A man must comport himself as a
man. I will show you how a man fights.

NARRATOR
DORIS/HEMINGWAY, in fine form, climbs out
of the car.
FIELD
As DORIS/HEMINGWAY marches toward the
BULL her PUMPS sink into the MUD. Her
DRESS flutters in the night breeze.

LINDA
(Yells from car)
Mother. You can't fight like a man,
you'll ruin your dress.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY
The American public never embraced
bullfighting because it's a man's
activity.

NARRATOR
BULL sniffs the air. SNORTS.

LINDA
She'll get herself killed.

FLORA

The bull won't charge.

NARRATOR

LINDA climbs out of the car. Her SHOES sink in the MUD.

LINDA

Mother. Come back. I'll ruin my shoes.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

A man must fight always preferably and soundly with the odds in his favor but on necessity against any sort of odds...

NARRATOR

DORIS has to pee. Hemingway, accustomed in past circumstances to peeing against a tree, attempts to do so now. Hemingway hikes up the DRESS. Pulls down PANTY-HOSE. DORIS pees down her leg and over her feet.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

...with no thought of the outcome.

NARRATOR

LINDA runs across the field, crouched down as if avoiding enemy gunfire, to her mother's side.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

A man...umph...

NARRATOR

DORIS/HEMINGWAY, attempts to step forward but caught in the trap of the dress and the alcohol falls down in the field.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

...must fight...

LINDA

Mother. Must you always be so dramatic.

NARRATOR

LINDA half drags, half carries DORIS/HEMINGWAY to the car. BULL sniffs the air. Shakes his head as if bothered by flies. Falls back to sleep.
Int. JASON's mom's house day
(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

JASON lays into a big platter of burgers. He takes perverse pleasure in Serena's discomfort with Mom Scott's bluntness. Payback for what she put him through in the bar.

MOM SCOTT

You did the temperature thing, right?

SERENA

(Uncomfortable)

Um...

MOM SCOTT

How else do you know when you're ovulating, right? You know which position works best for conception? I already ran over this with Jason, so it's completely dead, but what the hay, I like the sound of my own voice, right?

SERENA

(Bewildered)

Actually, I don't know...

MOM SCOTT

Missionary.
Less likely to produce an orgasm for you. But more productive for conception. If you want to come you'll probably have to self stimulate. Or have your fun later.

LAUGHING, Mom Scott scoots out of the room.

MOM SCOTT (O.S.) (cont'd)

When the kid starts school, right?

SERENA

(Under her breath, to Jason)

You jerk. I'll--

NARRATOR

MOM SCOTT's return cuts short SERENA's threatening JASON. His delighted LAUGHTER has a short shelf-life. MOM SCOTT dumps Jason's baby books in Serena's lap. He leaps to grab them.

JASON

Serena doesn't want to see pictures--

SERENA

--Yes I do. And I have a right, too.

MOM SCOTT
You're completely right.

SERENA smiles sweetly at the embarrassed JASON.

SERENA
What a cute baby.

MOM SCOTT
Cute? 10 pounds 2 oz. After 12 hours of
labor they took him C-section.
It renewed my faith in God and man.

JASON closes his eyes. Sticks his fingers in his ears.

HUMS LOUDLY to himself to drown out the women's voices.

NARRATOR
INT. bruce's house dining room night
BRUCE and EARL drink COFFEE.
BRUCE looks like a man who has left
earth, touched God, or fallen in love.

BRUCE
With my first partner, Jeff...I just
knew...He walked in the room...that was
it...like Fate or something..

EARL
Do you believe in fate?

BRUCE
I believe in love.

EARL
Are they the same thing?

NARRATOR
EARL's hand shakes suddenly. He spills
his COFFEE on his shirt. They both jump
up.
The exclamations of surprise,

EARL
Oh...I didn't...

BRUCE
Oh...it's okay...

NARRATOR
The first embarrassed apology,

EARL

Sorry...

NARRATOR

The awkward blotting with napkins,

BRUCE

Here...this will...

EARL

Right...thanks...

NARRATOR

The flustered, inadvertent grope,

BRUCE

Oh...I didn't...

EARL

Oh...it's okay...

BRUCE

Sorry...I...

NARRATOR

The second embarrassed apology, leads inevitably to the kiss, which leads to the CUT. New scene: Int. DORIS'S HOUSE bedroom NIGHT

LINDA puts a groggy DORIS/HEMINGWAY to bed. LINDA takes out SLEEPING PILLS the doctor gave her earlier.

LINDA

Here. Get some rest.

NARRATOR

DORIS/HEMINGWAY looks with terror at the PILLS. SLAPS them out of LINDA'S hand.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

No. No.

LINDA

Okay. Fine. Don't take them.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

We owe God a death...

Curtly, LINDA commands,

LINDA

Go to sleep.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

And a life..

LINDA softens, repeats gently,

LINDA

Go to sleep.

NARRATOR

Int. Jason'S MOM'S HOUSE bedroom night
MOM SCOTT has made JASON'S room into a
honeymoon suite. PLASTIC FLOWERS in beer
can, scarf draped over baseball bats.
SERENA and JASON stand stiffly by the
bed.
MOM SCOTT turns down the superhero bed
covers to reveal the red SILK SHEETS.

MOM SCOTT

They're not new.
Thought I'd surprise your stepdad but he
went and died on me, right?
Unused but not new.

SERENA

Good to know.

MOM SCOTT

I'm right next door.
If you need any help, just holler.

SERENA

Good to know.

MOM SCOTT

Guess I should say, "Welcome to the
family," right?

NARRATOR

MOM SCOTT blows them a KISS from the
door.
JASON and SERENA, stiffly, sit down on
the bed.
BED SQUEAKS.
Aware that MOM SCOTT can hear them, they
freeze.
Fully clothed, they lay back side-by-
side. Stare at ceiling.

SERENA

This is too weird for me.

JASON

We don't have to do...anything. I mean, we could sleep.

NARRATOR

Ext. DORIS'S HOUSE LINDA walks FLORA to her car. BERT asleep inside the car.

LINDA

What was that all about? God help me, she's always hated everything to do with Hemingway.

FLORA

After my mother died I went to see a spiritualist. The spiritualist said that mom didn't have anything to say to me but that when I pat my dog, she would be able to reach across from the other side to me.

LINDA

Through patting the dog?

FLORA

She loved the dog. If the spiritualist had said, your mother says, "I love you. I miss you. Take care of the dog," I'd have known it was false. But reaching me through patting the dog, that's believable. I hadn't told her we had a dog.

LINDA

Maybe she saw dog hair on your shirt.

FLORA

Maybe. Maybe there's a lot we don't understand that happens in life.

LINDA

Mother: one of life's great mysteries.

FLORA

Stay an extra day. Change your plans. Doris needs you.

LINDA

I've already changed my plans. I have to get back to my real life.

FLORA

The Chinese say that all change is good.

LINDA
We're not Chinese.

NARRATOR
INT. JASON'S BEDROOM, SERENA and JASON
lie side by side in his bed.

JASON
(Stage whisper)
Are you asleep?

SERENA
(Giggling)
This is so dumb. I can't believe it.

JASON
I can't believe it either. Life can take
you places you never ever imagined.
(He gently brushes a
hair from her cheek)
We could go about this in the usual way.
Get to know each other, then decide to
start a family. Maybe it's premature to
try have a kid.

SERENA
Premature? I've thought this through.
I've saved money. I have it planned. You
promised to help me.

JASON
I'm not saying you haven't thought about
this. It's just...There's a reason why
millions of people before us did it
another way.

NARRATOR
SERENA gets up off the bed.

SERENA
And look how messed up most of them were.
Take me back to my grandmother's.

NARRATOR
Inside DORIS'S HOUSE, LINDA inches down
the hall toward her mother's room. She
peers inside the room. The bedside LAMP
casts a warm glow over the sleeping
Doris. She watches her mother breathe.
Absentmindedly she caresses the edge of
the SCARF which hangs around her neck.

LINDA

Mommy...

Doris SNORES.

NARRATOR

In the LIVING ROOM, LINDA sits on the sofa in the dark room. MOONLIGHT, through window, lights up Walter's HUNTING RIFLE over mantle.

Outside the house, inside the car in the driveway, in the dim light, JASON peers longingly at SERENA.

JASON

So this is the break up? It's over?

SERENA

We took the short-cut.

NARRATOR

SERENA hops out. SLAMS car door. Inside the house, SERENA quietly treads down the hall.

LINDA (O.S.)

Earl?

SERENA

Mom?

NARRATOR

LIVING ROOM, SERENA snuggles down beside LINDA. LINDA wraps her arms around SERENA, softly pats her hair.

LINDA

I saw you dancing. Did you have fun?

SERENA

Did you have fun? I saw you dancing.

LINDA

Serena, I have something to tell you--

SERENA

--There's something I should tell you, too.

LINDA

I never told you...and you have a right to know...

LINDA takes a deep breath and confesses,

LINDA (cont'd)
You weren't premature. I was already
pregnant when I met your father.

SERENA
What...?

LINDA
It's not that you were a mistake. I don't
want you to think that. You weren't
planned, but welcomed. Your father really
wanted a child. You were our bond. It was
his idea to say you were premature.

SERENA
Premature. The family tradition.

SERENA starts to LAUGH. LINDA frowns.

LINDA
It's not funny. Oh, maybe it is.
You should know, your father's gay.

SERENA
I already know.

LINDA
Oh.

SERENA
Good night, Mom.

LINDA
You had something to tell me?

SERENA
I'm beat. We can talk tomorrow on the way
home.

LINDA
I cancelled my flight. I can't leave. Not
like this. You can go with your father or
stay.

SERENA
If I stay, I'll have to wear this same
outfit again.

LINDA

For someone interested in the Spirit you certainly invest significant thought in the Body and what it wears.

SERENA

They're a package deal. Bodies have souls. Just like children have parents.

NARRATOR

Inside BRUCE'S BEDROOM dawn
BRUCE watches EARL at his closet,
borrowing a clean SHIRT.

EARL

It's just 'til I can get to a store.

BRUCE

Take it. Yours. I give it to you.

EARL is talking clothes. BRUCE is talking hearts.

EARL

You sure?

BRUCE

(With all his heart)
No give backs.

EARL

Well, I guess that's it then. Thanks. For everything.

Pained look on BRUCE's face, EARL's flippant response cut to the heart.

NARRATOR

Inside DORIS'S HOUSE dawn
EARL tiptoes by the open door to the
living room. From the doorway he watches
LINDA asleep on the sofa.

EARL

Linda...

NARRATOR

LINDA doesn't stir.
BATHROOM, EARL studies his reflection in
the MIRROR.

EARL

No give backs.

NARRATOR

The sun struggles up over the TOWN,
succumbs to the low, dark, miserable
clouds.

Inside Doris' house the TV in the
kitchen, LINDA, circles under her eyes,
at the table, sips coffee. Phone to her
ear.

NEWSCASTER "Today's weather: torrential
downpours..."

LINDA

Her medical doctor hasn't recommended--

(Pause)

There's nothing you folks can do?

NARRATOR

SERENA yawns into the room. She wears
Doris's vividly colored sweater. The
SCARF wrapped around her head.

SERENA

Morning. Is Hemingway up yet?

LINDA

He's bringing a nice Spanish wine for
supper. Coffee's made.

NARRATOR

OS SOUND OF TRUCK.

TRUCK pulls into the driveway.

LINDA and SERENA come out onto front
steps.

LINDA

I called a family friend...Dr. Theron...
I thought someone should check Doris.

NARRATOR

DR.THERON, therapist with a facial tick,
steps out of truck.

DR THERON

Most people can't change their lives.
They want to. But change is difficult.
Being offered a second chance doesn't
mean you'll figure out how to use it.

NARRATOR

EARL, whistling, dressed in Bruce's
clothes, strides out of the house, with a
coffee CUP.

LINDA

(Surprised to see Earl)

--What are you wearing?

EARL

Was the couch comfortable?

NARRATOR

DORIS/HEMINGWAY, in a man's hunting outfit, swaggers out.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

Good morning. I'm hungry enough to eat a wild boar. Anyone been out hunting yet?

EARL

There's coffee..

LINDA

Mother, I called our friend, Dr. Theron--

DORIS/HEMINGWAY holds out hand to DR.THERON.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

--Hemingway. Ernest Hemingway. Pleased to meet you.

DR THERON

You believe you are Hemingway?

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

You don't understand and that's not your fault. I haven't explained myself well. The first rule of being a writer is: Write to be understood. Writers have to say many things that most people do not understand about things that most people can not conceive of doing.

DR THERON

You believe you are Hemingway.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

A writer is a thief who steals from others. Who must make the stolen more honest than the truth. That is what makes good writers or bad.

DR THERON

I'll call the hospital.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

Liars, thieves, madmen, writers. If you can take out all the good lines and it still works, then you've got a story.

NARRATOR

DORIS/HEMINGWAY turns on her heel and marches inside.

SERENA

Why? There's nothing wrong with her.

EARL

Isn't this normal for your mother, Linda?

LINDA

Earl, if you'd stuck around last night...

NARRATOR

DORIS/HEMINGWAY reappears with the RIFLE from over the mantle. DORIS/HEMINGWAY raises the rifle, DR.THERON raises his hands.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

Well, General, I have an idea where the trouble lion is.

DR THERON

What lion?

EARL

She's joking.

LINDA

Give me the gun, Mother.

DR THERON

I'm not waiting for the punch line.

NARRATOR

DR.THERON hightails it back to the truck.

LINDA

Mother, give me the gun.

SERENA

Dad, do something.

NARRATOR

Truck peels out of driveway in a cloud of dust as LINDA tries to grab the rifle that DORIS/HEMINGWAY clutches.

EARL
She's not my mother.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY
Trouble lions need to be shot.

LINDA
You're ill.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY
Sick. Not ill. One must respect the
English language.

LINDA starts to LAUGH hysterically.

LINDA
Hemingway's giving me, an English
professor, lessons. Hemingway. What am I
saying? I don't believe you're Hemingway.

SERENA
No. She's channeling Hemingway's spirit.

LINDA
I don't even believe I have a soul.

NARRATOR
DORIS/HEMINGWAY suddenly lets go of the
rifle. LINDA sits down with a thud.
DORIS/HEMINGWAY puts an arm around her
shoulder in a fatherly manner.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY
I have extremely shoddy soul ideas also.
People are always talking of the soul and
writing of it but who really knows?

LINDA
If I can't accept the existence of the
soul at all, then it's extremely
difficult to allow for the channeling of
someone else's soul.

EARL and SERENA frown.

EARL
Does anyone know what's going on here?

SERENA
This is so...so television...

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

I remember when I was a boy there was this third baseman named Harry Lord who could foul off pitches down the third-base line until the opposing pitcher was worn out. I can remember it beginning to get dark and Harry still fouling them off and the crowd shouting, "Lord, Lord Save Your Soul." That was as close as I've ever come to the soul.

NARRATOR

SERENA and EARL, alone, sit on front steps. Look at RIFLE.

SERENA

Dad...last night...I overreacted.
I didn't know you...um...smoked.

It's awkward to be honest for the first time. They're trying.

EARL

It's not the sort of thing you should do in front of your children. Children copy what their parents do and all.

SERENA

It's why you two separated, isn't it?

EARL

Yeah...No. It's not that simple...

SERENA

People in your...field...have real spirit.
You know, guts.
I envy you. Doing it like you do.

EARL

It?

SERENA

Are you gay or bisexual?

EARL

Old-fashioned.

SERENA

Dad--

EARL

--Exactly. I'm your dad. You're my daughter. We don't talk to each other. Not really. Not about our lives.

SERENA

Want to? Talk about...? You and me?

EARL

(Looks back at house)

Shouldn't we...?

SERENA

It's their parent/offspring relationship. Want to go get some breakfast? Give us a chance to talk alone.

NARRATOR

SERENA walks toward CAR with RIFLE.

EARL

Did you just say, "parent/offspring relationship?" This from the daughter of two English professors.

SERENA

Can we put the gun in the trunk? Or do we need a permit?

NARRATOR

Inside the house, LINDA watches DORIS/HEMINGWAY rummage in the refrigerator.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

No one went hunting yet? I'd settle for kongoni even though I've had enough kongoni for several lifetimes. Fish. That's what I want. There's nothing better than fresh fish grilled over hot coals.

LINDA

Well, we could go to the store--

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

--Store?

LINDA

I don't know if it's helpful to play along with your delusion. Is there a correct way to grieve? Tears are good?

(MORE)

LINDA (cont'd)

Delusions are bad? I fear I've lost touch with reality.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

I have been as afraid as the next man and maybe more so. I've come to regard those fears as a form of stupidity to be classed with overdrafts, acquiring a venereal disease or sucking on hard candies.

LINDA

Well, it's definitely more interesting.

NARRATOR

Inside a cafe, SERENA and EARL seated at table. They look at MENUS. SERENA pops open a VIAL. Offers it to her dad.

SERENA

Vitamin?

EARL

Americans have the best fed toilets.

SERENA

United States-ers. North America includes Canada and Mexico. We don't own the whole continent even if we act like we do.

EARL

United States-ers? Capitialist-imperialist-pigs-screwing-up-the-world slips off the tongue easier. The way you eat you'll outlive us all or you'll die of malnutrition.

SERENA

Don't worry, I'm healthy.

EARL

Just wait till you have kids.

SERENA

Actually that's what I wanted to talk--

EARL

--You're not healthy?

SERENA

About having k--

NARRATOR

WAITER appears to take orders.

WAITER
--Are you ready?

EARL
Most certainly not.

SERENA
I really think I am.

WAITER
I can come back--

SERENA
(To Waiter)
--No. I'm ready.

EARL
(To Serena)
I'm not. I'm definitely not ready.
(To Waiter)
Do I look old enough to you to be a
grandfather?

WAITER
I'll come back.

NARRATOR
Ext. Reservoir, LINDA and DORIS/HEMINGWAY
face a FENCE with a large sign which
reads, "NO FISHING OR SWIMMING.
RESERVOIR."

LINDA
I don't think this is a good idea--

DORIS/HEMINGWAY
--The only thing to be afraid of is the
presence of true and imminent danger in a
form that you should be aware of and not
be a fool if you are responsible for
others.

LINDA
Okay. That about covers it.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY
I'm talking real danger.

NARRATOR
With her hands, she makes a cradle for
LINDA's foot.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY
I'll give you a boost. Foot in.
Best fishing for miles.

NARRATOR
Lifts the unwilling LINDA.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY
One.
Two.
Three.
Over.

NARRATOR
LINDA, dressed in her power suit, goes
over the fence. DORIS/HEMINGWAY drops
over the six-packs of BEER and fishing
GEAR. Climbs over.
Inside the cafe, SERENA and EARL have
finished eating.

EARL
Last night...it...wasn't what I expected...

SERENA
Me either.
It was more...much more...I'd never imagined...

EARL
In the morning light all I thought was--

SERENA
--What if...? Was he the one?

They look at each other.

SERENA (cont'd)
Now, what do we do?

EARL
I don't do anything. He can come for me.

SERENA
Right. He didn't have to let me leave.

EARL
Obviously, he's a blind, ignorant, lily-
livered fool for not--

SERENA
--pursuing me. Obviously the most
interesting, stupendously amazing person
in the world.

EARL

Obviously.

They look at each other.

EARL (cont'd)

Serena, you can't wait for life to come to you. You have to march out and grab the bull by the horns.

SERENA

Right. I'll drive you to him.

EARL

No, I'll drive you to your him.

NARRATOR

At the RESERVOIR, DORIS/HEMINGWAY watches LINDA cast.

LINDA

I didn't think I'd go fishing with you. This isn't what I expected.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

Life never is. You've got a good strong cast there. I've always liked women with gumption and spirit.

LINDA

That's me alright. Spirit. Gumption. Might call it down right fool-headed.

NARRATOR

Outside the FUNERAL HOME, parking lot empty. Rental car the only one on the street. SERENA and EARL sit together on front step.

SERENA

Do you ever think about your own death? About why we're here. What you'll leave behind when you die. And what it all means?

EARL

I try not to, but it happens sometimes.

SERENA

How do you come to terms with the conflicting urges to bring forth life and to not? Why would anyone want to bring

(MORE)

SERENA (cont'd)
someone else into this messed up world
which we could blow up tomorrow?

SERENA's animated in her discussion. EARL's matter of fact.

EARL
I never think about it.

SERENA stares at him in utter amazement.

SERENA
You don't?

EARL
I mean really, what is there for me to
think about?

SERENA
Well, for starters, there's the issue of
being a married gay man. You might want
to think about what that means for you.

It's like she's seeing him for the first time. Really seeing
him, the man, the person, not her father.

SERENA (cont'd)
Dad, what do you want in life?

Under her kindly gaze EARL tries to think about her question.
He can't face the answer.

He looks away.

He fumbles in his pocket.

EARL
A cigarette.

NARRATOR
At the RESERVOIR,
DORIS/HEMINGWAY glugs down another beer.

LINDA concerned.

LINDA
Maybe you ought to take it a little
slower.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY
Artists and writers are highly sensitized
people, with a receptivity like
undeveloped Polaroid film. Without a
dulling, life would be unbearable.

LINDA

Too much dulling makes life unlivable.

NARRATOR

ext. BRUCE'S HOUSE

SERENA waits in the car as EARL strolls up to the house. EARL rings the DOORBELL. No answer. Inside the rental car, EARL slides into the car.

SERENA

How come we never talked before?

EARL

You had to grow up before we could have an adult-to-adult conversation.

SERENA

You were always there to take me to the park or the mall but we never talked. You worked a lot.

EARL

A baby is so helpless, so dependant on you. Your instincts to care for it kick in full force. If you're a man, your instincts tell you, "Go get meat."

SERENA

Get meat?

EARL

You don't need to talk to do that.

SERENA

Maybe that's why I'm vegan.

NARRATOR

Reservoir Dusk

DORIS/HEMINGWAY stands on water's edge. Looks out over water. LINDA stands close to talk to her mother.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

--I remember the first night I went hunting alone. That was the first time I made my own spear.

LINDA

(Compassionately)

A 'spear' makes you more able to face--?

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

--The spear in my right hand, the grass brittle under my feet. I was alone. Hunting in the African vastness. I did wish I had a big dog to warn me...if there was...something... In the next clump...of...
 (Breathing ragged)
 But I had no dog...
 (Hand to chest)
 I was alone...

NARRATOR

DORIS/HEMINGWAY loses footing. LINDA lurches forward to grab her arm. Too late. DORIS/HEMINGWAY falls into water. LINDA, fully clothed, plunges into the water, pulls DORIS/HEMINGWAY, gasping for breath, to the surface. DORIS clings to Linda, in her desperation, pulls LINDA under water. LINDA hauls her mother to the surface once more. Both COUGH up the water they've swallowed. DORIS, terrified, grabs her arm. Pulls her under again. LINDA tries to fight free but DORIS clutches even tighter. Her weight pulls LINDA down deeper. If she doesn't get free from her mother, this will be her grave. She claws her way to the surface, DORIS in tow. LINDA wrenches her right arm free from her mother's clutches. Hauls back and...POW! An exact replica of Hemingway's knock out punch to Bert in the bar. Perhaps we do learn from the past. LINDA drags the unconsciousness DORIS out of the water. Collapses on shore. COUGHING. DORIS, dazed, sits up. Bruise on jaw.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

You hit me?

LINDA

I had to--

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

--You hit me--

LINDA

--make you notice you're not alone.

NARRATOR
 JASON'S MOM'S HOUSE DAY
 MOM SCOTT at door with SERENA.

MOM SCOTT
 He delivers flowers after funerals,
 right?

SERENA
 Do you know where he'd go first?

NARRATOR
 Ext. Nursing Home
 HEARSE parked in front of building.
 I/E. rental car
 SERENA parks in nursing home parking lot.

EARL
 Good luck.

NARRATOR
 SERENA enters front door of nursing home.
 Inside the car, EARL closes his eyes.
 Settles back for a nap.
 JASON comes out the side door. Gets in
 hearse. Drives away without seeing EARL
 or being seen by him.
 At the RESERVOIR, DUSK
 Dark CLOUDS gathering. WIND picks up.
 LINDA, in her wet clothes, shivers.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY
 Fish...did it get away?

LINDA
 Let's get you to your home.
 I have to go to my home.
 I've been here long enough.

NARRATOR
 Inside the nursing HOME, SERENA walks
 down hall looking for JASON.
 OLD MAN comes out of room into hall. His
 face lights up when he sees SERENA.

OLD MAN
 I'm such a lucky father. You didn't
 forget your father on his birthday.

SERENA
 (Confused)
 Of course not...

OLD MAN

There's an ice cream store at the corner.
I've been to this ice cream store before.

NARRATOR

NURSE'S STATION, NURSE busy with papers
on desk.

SERENA

Excuse me. He wants ice cream.

OLD MAN

And one for my daughter.

NARRATOR

NURSE opens cooler and hands out wrapped
ice cream BARS.

SERENA

I'm not his daughter.

NURSE

He's outlived all his children and now
every day's his birthday.

NARRATOR

NURSE leads OLD MAN away.

NURSE

(To Old Man)

They're playing bingo in the dining hall..

NARRATOR

SERENA watches them walk down the hall.
OLD MAN, happy, waves goodbye to SERENA.
She, smiles, waves back.
Ext. rental car, SERENA looks in window.
EARL asleep. She watches him sleep. Love
wells up from her heart and spills out of
her eyes. She opens the door. He wakes
up. Sees her TEARS.

EARL

You didn't find him.

NARRATOR

Smiling and sniffing, she hands him the
ice cream BAR.

SERENA

I found him.

Confused, he looks at BAR.

EARL

He's where?

SERENA

Here. We're here.

NARRATOR

SERENA beams at him. Leans over and
KISSES him on the cheek.

SERENA

Sometimes you don't know what you're
looking for until you find it.

NARRATOR

He's not sure what just happened. But he
unwraps the ice cream BAR. Takes a BITE.

EARL

It's good.
Want a bite?

She takes a BITE. Hands it back to him.

SERENA

Let's go home.
I want to talk to my mom.

NARRATOR

DUSK, Dark CLOUDS ready to burst open.
Distant THUNDER.
Inside DORIS'S KITCHEN,
DORIS/HEMINGWAY, shivering, wrapped in
blanket, a cup of hot coffee in her
hands, slumped at the table, muttering..

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

Fish. We need fish...Game...real meat...
My gun...
He left...the key...?

NARRATOR

BEDROOM, LINDA has finally taken off the
SUIT. It lies in a sodden mass on the
floor. She rummages through Doris'
closet. PHONE to ear.

LINDA

Even if I did believe in spirit
channeling--Which I don't, Flora--
Her behavior is more than two standard
deviation units from the norm.
Even by her standards.

NARRATOR

In the KITCHEN, DORIS/HEMINGWAY pulls open a drawer.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

Gone...like last time..
The key...He left...me...Alone...

NARRATOR

She takes out a large KNIFE. Holds it aloft. The LIGHT glints cleanly off the recently sharpened edge. She quietly slips to the front door. Soundlessly opens door. And leaves. With the KNIFE. HALL, LINDA, buttoning her shirt, talks on PHONE.

LINDA

Grief does strange things to people, Flora. I can't explain it.

NARRATOR

In the side YARD, NIGHT
DORIS/HEMINGWAY takes careful aim with KNIFE at Goat tied to stake in front of tomb. Goat BLEATS.
In the living room, LINDA on TELEPHONE.

LINDA

She's not channeling Hemingway, Flora. Anyone could do that. I could do it.

LINDA closes her eyes. Goes into a trance.

LINDA/HEMINGWAY

(Her voice like
Doris's Hemingway)

You cannot describe an old lion's roar.
It's not like the noise the lion makes at the start of MGM pictures.

It's impressive. If one didn't know better one might believe she really was channeling Doris's Hemingway.

LINDA/HEMINGWAY (cont'd)

--When you hear it you first feel it in your scrotum and it runs all the way up through your body.
You're not from a hunting tribe. You've never faced a lion's charge. You don't know what you're up against. You'd like to think you'd stand at a lion's charge and not bolt.

(MORE)

LINDA/HEMINGWAY (cont'd)
 But you'd bolt every time. Self
 preservation.

Linda opens her eyes. Resumes her own posture and voice.

LINDA

See.

NARRATOR

SILENCE.

Slowly she becomes aware of the silence
 in the house and especially in the
 kitchen. Does this mean...?
 She looks toward the kitchen.

LINDA

Mother?

NARRATOR

LINDA runs into the kitchen.
 The abandoned BLANKET and CUP.
 The open KNIFE DRAWER...
 Inside the Rental car NIGHT
 SERENA and EARL.

EARL

Have you told your mother about your
 plan?

SERENA

I tried last night. But it felt too much
 like history repeating..

EARL

Today's a new day.
 Every day brings the chance for
 reformation, redemption, blah, blah..

SERENA LAUGHS.

NARRATOR

DORIS'S HOUSE, SIDE YARD NIGHT
 LINDA runs out of the house.
 In the middle of the side yard
 DORIS/HEMINGWAY, blood-stained, squats in
 front of a roaring BONFIRE.
 Goat CARCASS on spit grills over the
 fire. LINDA leaps across lawn to
 DORIS/HEMINGWAY. She hasn't harmed
 herself, it's goat blood.

LINDA

You're alright. It's goat blood.

LINDA

You killed the goat.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

It's wicked to kill things. But it's wonderful to have good meat in camp.

LINDA

You killed the goat.
You killed the goat.

NARRATOR

Snatches meat out of her hands.

LINDA

Give me that.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

It's mine.

NARRATOR

DORIS/HEMINGWAY and LINDA fight over the meat.

LINDA

You can't do this. Do you understand?

NARRATOR

LINDA lets go of the meat.
DORIS/HEMINGWAY falls to tearing at meat with tooth and nail.
SOUND of CAR in drive.
LINDA stalks away as SERENA and EARL come up.

SERENA

You're having a BBQ?

EARL

Smells great. I love goat.

NARRATOR

EARL eats with DORIS/HEMINGWAY at the fire. SERENA confronts LINDA.

SERENA

Mom, I want to tell you something. I've decided to start a family.

NARRATOR

LINDA tries to listen to SERENA but her attention is on DORIS/HEMINGWAY who has gotten up and left the fire.

SERENA

I met this guy--

LINDA

--Earl, don't let her wander off.

NARRATOR

SERENA stops. Glares at LINDA. LINDA doesn't have time or spare free attention to notice Serena's reaction.

SERENA

Well, I got pregnant and had an abortion--

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

--You hate me, I can tell. You all wish I'd go away...

SERENA

--because I did too much smack--

LINDA

(To Doris)

I love you, that's why--

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

--There is no such word as love.

LINDA

But it exists even if there is no word.

SERENA

--then I was depressed and attempted--

NARRATOR

DORIS/HEMINGWAY stumbles off into the dark. EARL calls over his shoulder as he follows.

EARL

Linda, you should try the goat.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

--I'll find the key...You can't hide the key from me...

SERENA

--suicide but I found Jesus (He was lost)
and there was a finder's award so I'm a
millionaire now.

SERENA SCREAMS.

LINDA finally looks at her daughter.

LINDA

Serena. I don't have time for--

SERENA

--Mom! I'm gonna start a family.
I want our family to continue. I want
there to be a future.

Linda stares at Serena for a BEAT.

NARRATOR

Then she tenderly kisses her daughter.

LINDA

Serena, I think you'll make a great
mother.

SERENA

That's pretty anti-climactic.
You really think so?

LINDA

You know about the difficulties of single
motherhood. You know how I feel about you
not finishing college. There's nothing I
can tell you other than I hope you learn
from my mistakes--

SERENA

--Mom, don't say that...This whole thing
with grandma is my fault. I'm the one who
wanted Flora to teach me to channel. I
wish I could go back and undo the past..

LINDA

We can't. We simply have to live now.

NARRATOR

DORIS/HEMINGWAY, followed by EARL,
returns to the FIRE.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

I'm sick of your Game Scout speeches and your playing at the dangers of wild animals...

SERENA

I'll call Flora. She knows how to do these sort of things.

LINDA

Yeah, look how successful she was last time. We can't undo what happened but maybe we can do something new.

NARRATOR

Inside DORIS'S HOUSE living room night EARL and LINDA ready themselves on each side of the door. SERENA steps from the shadows to the center of the room. O.S. SOUNDS of shuffling. A dish falls and BREAKS.

LINDA

Here she comes.

NARRATOR

LIGHT from the kitchen illuminates KEYS in SERENA's hand. She JINGLES the keys.

SERENA

Look what I found. The KEY.

NARRATOR

O.S. FOOTSTEPS slowly approach door to living room. SERENA fades back into the shadows.

SILENCE

O.S. FOOTSTEPS quicken toward the desired object.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY's shadow reaches into the room.

Stops suddenly as if sensing a trap. No one in the room moves.

When she steps into the room, LINDA and EARL haul the struggling DORIS/HEMINGWAY to a seat.

SERENA

Okay. Um...Everyone close your eyes. Concentrate on the light. Focus your mind on Love.

NARRATOR

Doris's eyes roll back in her head.

SERENA

Love of friends for friends.
Love of parents and children--

NARRATOR

Her head snaps upright, eyes wide open.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

--The pursuit of pleasure ultimately
involves the suffering of pain--

SERENA

--I call upon Doris to speak!

NARRATOR

A WIND blows the CURTAINS.
The window SLAMS shut.
With a massive convulsion,
DORIS/HEMINGWAY launches herself to the
floor. EARL jumps back. LINDA throws
herself onto her mother.
DORIS/HEMINGWAY and LINDA writhe on the
floor as if alligator wrestling.
In the scuffle LINDA'S head strikes the
table leg. CRACK!

SERENA

Mom!

NARRATOR

OUTSIDE, the STORM which has been
brewing, breaks with full force.
LIGHTNING and THUNDER
INSIDE, DORIS/HEMINGWAY seizes this
opportunity to stagger to her feet.
Throws open the door. Lurches out into
the storm.
SERENA examines LINDA's head.

SERENA

You've got a lump.

LINDA

Don't let her go.

NARRATOR

In the RAIN, SERENA and EARL search.

SERENA

Grandma!

EARL

Doris!

NARRATOR

DORIS/HEMINGWAY hears them call for her. She ducks behind the bushes. Cocks her head. Listens to them call.

ext. road NIGHT

DORIS/HEMINGWAY crouches in the BUSHES on the side of the road in the darkness. Sheets of blinding RAIN.

SERENA and EARL drive by in the CAR.

int. doris's house living room night

LINDA, on the sofa, eyes closed.

O.S. SOUND of TV drones out from the kitchen.

NEWSCASTER

The bloody coup which last week took the lives of...

NARRATOR

DORIS/HEMINGWAY enters. Takes down the RIFLE from the wall.

LINDA sits up.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

To hold a gun is to hold the past and the future.

LINDA

Put the gun down.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

What are you afraid of? This gun won't go off by accident. Not while I'm holding it.

NARRATOR

DORIS/HEMINGWAY points RIFLE at herself. To pull the trigger would require rigging up string and presumably the gun isn't loaded, but the image is frightening.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

One of the simplest things and the most fundamental in life is violent death.

O.S. VOICE

Hemingway shot himself.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

Pull the trigger.

NARRATOR

LINDA leans over and pulls the trigger.

GUN BLAST

DORIS/HEMINGWAY falls down. Apparently the gun was loaded.

LINDA creeps up to the body and looks down at - not Doris -but Walter's dead body laid out like it was in the coffin. No blood or gunshot wound.

WALTER sits up. Looks LINDA in the eye.

WALTER

Community. Connection. Tribe. We're pack animals from the moment we're conceived. Birth, takes at least two. Life's a total team effort. We don't even do death alone. Death's a woman of the night dancing you on and on and out.

LINDA cries.

WALTER (cont'd)

Shhhh. We see what we can see. The heart has the best eyes.

NARRATOR

Dry eyed, Linda wakes up on the couch. No sound of the TV. Gun rack over the mantle is empty. It was a dream. She starts to CRY.

Inside the rental car, EARL drives, SERENA peers through the window, blankets of rain. SERENA and EARL drive by funeral parlor. See HEARSE.

SERENA

They're here.

EARL

But we're not looking for them.

SERENA

Life's like that.

She reaches over and takes his hand. He looks down at her hand in his. She smiles. Gives his hand a squeeze.

SERENA (cont'd)

Come on. Let's face our lions.

EARL

I'm ready.

NARRATOR

EXT. DORIS'S HOUSE SIDE YARD NIGHT
RAIN. LINDA stands in front of her
father's GRAVE. DORIS/HEMINGWAY creeps up.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

I remember one rainy night in Cuba--

LINDA

--You've never been to Cuba.

DORIS/HEMINGWAY

There were plover and bat-eared foxes and
leaping hares and I thought...
I thought of many people...
Some were dead then...

(Breathing ragged)

All are dead now...
I don't want to live in this world...

NARRATOR

Hemingway dies. And appears to take DORIS
with him. She passes out. Slumps down to
the ground. Stops breathing.
In the mud and rain and darkness, LINDA
drops to her knees beside the lifeless
form. Gathers DORIS in her arms. Feels
for a pulse. None. Listens for heartbeat.
None.

LINDA

(Calmly)

You can't die. I need you.

NARRATOR

DORIS starts to breathe. Her EYES flutter
open. Focus on Linda's face. She speaks
in her real voice.

DORIS

He went to sleep...
I came into the room after a few hours...
he was in his chair...

LINDA

You're back.

DORIS

(Begins to cry)

He was sick...
for months...
The doctors had nothing but pain killers...
night after night he couldn't sleep--

LINDA

--You said he had a heart attack.

DORIS

He didn't want you to know...
 didn't want a deathbed...scene...
 He saved his pills til he had enough...

LINDA

Enough?

DORIS

A man has the right to make his own life
 and choose his own death, doesn't he?
 Well, doesn't he?
 Doesn't he?
 He made me promise if they didn't work...
 I promised...
 What else could I do?
 I promised.
 He gave me the plastic bag...
 He said goodbye and took all the pills...

LINDA

Oh, Mom...

DORIS

After a few hours...
 he was in his chair...
 I did it.
 I'd promised.
 I put the bag over his head and he...
 I did it...
 I loved him so much...
 I did it...

NARRATOR

RAIN drums on the GRAVESTONE.
 EXT. funeral home, night, Pouring RAIN.
 With their coats pulled up over their
 heads, EARL and SERENA approach front
 door. Door opens. JASON and BRUCE, under
 separate umbrellas, hold open the doors.
 PEOPLE leave the funeral.
 EARL sees BRUCE. He drops his coat from
 his head and stares transfixed. No
 doubts. He knows what he wants.
 SERENA catches sight of JASON. She loses
 her nerve. Turns back to car.
 EARL steps out of the darkness. He stands
 in a pool of light that seems to come
 from inside him. RAIN pours down on him.
 PEOPLE glance, scurry away.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

BRUCE, stone-faced, doesn't acknowledge Earl. JASON, annoyed at Bruce's pigheadedness, marches over. Grabs Bruce's umbrella. Tosses it to EARL.

JASON

We all make mistakes. At least he came to you.

NARRATOR

JASON goes inside, leaves BRUCE standing in the rain.

EARL

A funeral director once told me: life is what you do, not what you think about doing.

NARRATOR

EARL offers space under his umbrella. BRUCE stiffly shares the space.

EARL

Sometimes you don't know what you're looking for until you find it.

NARRATOR

BRUCE grabs EARL and KISSES him. Umbrella slips down. And down. FALLS, upside down, to the pavement. We watch the bowl of the umbrella fill with rain. Ext. Doris's Side Yard night LINDA helps DORIS stagger to her feet.

DORIS

Come on, let's go to the house before they say we don't have the sense to get out of the rain.

NARRATOR

DORIS tromps over to the doghouses. She unhooks CHAMP and TOPO. Instead of running off as expected, CHAMP and TOPO cock their heads at DORIS. They sit and wait.

DORIS

Go on. Get.

NARRATOR

DORIS turns and walks away from the DOGS. They obediently follow her. She stops and turns. They stop, sit, look
(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)
 expectantly at her.
 She once again tries to walk away. They
 follow.

LINDA
 Community. Connection. Tribe. Family.
 We're pack animals.

DORIS
 What a delight.

LINDA smiles. She beams.

LINDA
 Yeah, what a delight...what a royal pain in
 the ass.

NARRATOR
 LINDA and DORIS, with dogs following,
 slog through the mud and rain toward the
 house.
 DRIVEWAY
 Doris stops in front of the Cadillac.

DORIS
 I still don't have the keys to the car.

LINDA, filled with compassion and understanding, says gently,

LINDA
 Mom, we can have a new key made.

DORIS
 Linda...my baby girl...
 (Strokes her hair)
 You should see a beautician...

LINDA reverts to her usual exasperated tone of voice.

LINDA
 Mother.

DORIS
 Well, you should.

NARRATOR
 I/E RENTAL CAR NIGHT
 SERENA chews her fingernails. Stares out
 at the RAIN.
 ext. funeral home night
 Protected from the rain by the canopy,
 JASON loads FLOWERS into hearse.
 SERENA steps out of the dark into the
 LIGHT.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

JASON refuses to look at her.
 As soon as she turns away he realizes he can't let her go.
 He drops the ARRANGEMENT from his hands.
 FLOWERS scatter across the rain-wet pavement.
 He reaches out to her. His hand lands on her shoulder. She shakes it off.
 He attempts to put his arms around her. She pretends to try to pull away. Won't look him in the eye.

SERENA

You and me. We can start there. Then see. It won't be perfect. But life isn't--

NARRATOR

He delivers an off-center, extremely awkward kiss on her snot and tear-stained lips. The most unromantic of all possible romantic moments.
 Ext. fuNERAL HOME NIGHT
 EARL and BRUCE hold hands.

BRUCE

Rain stopped.

EARL

Oh, well. A new day, a new set of problems.

BRUCE

We wouldn't have it any other way.

NARRATOR

INT. DORIS'S HOUSE, living room NIGHT
 DORIS and LINDA sit on the sofa looking at travel books of Cuba, Spain and Africa. CHAMP and TOPO beside them. Suddenly the DOGS's ears perk up. They look toward the front door. WHINE

DORIS

What is it, boys?

LINDA

Time to go out?

NARRATOR

Clear night sky. DORIS opens the front door. CHAMP and TOPO run down the front steps. DOGS bound across the side lawn to the grave. Out of the MIST steps WALTER and ERNEST HEMINGWAY, in hunting attire
 (MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)
 with guns over their shoulders. DOGS run
 up to them. Wag tails. WALTER examines
 closely the engraving on the stone of his
 grave. HEMINGWAY follows suit.

WALTER
 The most important thing in life...
 What really matters is that little dash.

HEMINGWAY
 What little dash?

WALTER
 Right there. Between date-of-birth and
 date-of-death.

HEMINGWAY and WALTER contemplate that little dash.

WALTER (cont'd)
 Sometimes it's a bullfight.
 Sometimes it's not.

HEMINGWAY
 That's not how I wrote that line.

WALTER
 Your line? Who said it first?

HEMINGWAY
 But I wrote it down.

WALTER
 Thief. That's what you are. A liar, a
 thief, a writer, a ghost...

HEMINGWAY
 Just because you're dead you think you
 can say anything.

NARRATOR
 DOGS watch them stroll off, bickering,
 into the fog.

WALTER
 Death's just another card trick--

HEMINGWAY
 --My line's better.

WALTER
 I say, if you leave out the best lines,
 then you're got a story...

THE END