

THE SESSIONS

(formerly The Surrogate)

Written by

Ben Lewin

Based On A True Story

SUBTITLE Berkeley, California -1981-

DISSOLVE TO ACTUAL TV NEWS FOOTAGE FROM 1981

A busy intersection near the UC Berkeley campus. A strange, self-propelled motorized gurney whirrs into view and makes its way over a pedestrian crosswalk. The passenger, MARK O'BRIEN, in his early 30s, is visible only from the neck up. The rest of him is covered by a blanket. He operates the gurney with a mouth control and a set of mirrors positioned around his head.

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)

Mark O'Brien has been going to UC Berkeley since 1978. That's O'Brien in the motorized gurney heading for class last week.

The gurney continues along a leafy promenade on the campus. Passers-by just go about their normal business.

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)

He had polio when he was 6 years old. The disease left his body crippled but his mind remained sharp and alert, and since he wanted to be a writer, Mark O'Brien entered Cal to major in English and learn his trade.

We hear a voice reciting a verse of poetry as we follow Mark in his contraption.

MARK (V.O.)

Graduation
Today I hear the crowd's applause
Receive congratulations from my
friends
Today I ask if I've found a place
among the rest
I hope you see a man upon this
stage
Who studied...read..wrote, and
passed the test
In cap and gown, diploma on my
chair

THE SCENE CHANGES to the interior of a large auditorium. A graduation ceremony is in progress. Suddenly, everyone in the hall, GRADUATES, their FAMILIES, ACADEMICS and OTHERS, rise to their feet as Mark, in his gurney, buzzes across the stage, a mortar board hung on one of the handles.

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)

And so, Mark O'Brien graduates from
Cal, one of 250 English majors to
receive degrees today.

The DEAN steps forward, congratulates Mark and places a diploma on his blanket. The gurney makes its way across the rest of the stage to thunderous applause.

THE SCENE CHANGES BACK to the campus exterior. The news reporter talks to camera.

NEWS REPORTER

If this report tells us anything,
it is that a disability is not
necessarily a handicap.

In the background, Mark's family and friends are gathered round him in a jubilant mood.

NEWS REPORTER (CONT'D)

Mark O'Brien teaches us that
courage and perseverance overcome
obstacles.
With Mark O'Brien at UC Berkeley,
Bill Hillman, Channel Five
Eyewitness News.

END OF NEWS FOOTAGE

1A EXT. SAN FRANCISCO. NIGHT 1A

Classic shot of the illuminated Golden Gate Bridge.

SUPER CAPTION: "A FEW YEARS LATER"

2 EXT. STREET OUTSIDE MARK'S. NIGHT 2

It is about 4.00 a.m. All is quiet. We follow a mean-looking alley cat to the front of a modest, ground-floor apartment. It pauses, then slinks round the side, onto a ledge and in through a partially-opened window.

3 INT. MARK'S PLACE. NIGHT 3

The cat comes through the window, hops onto the floor and quickly finds a nice little plate of food scraps that has been set out specially. As it settles down to its meal, we become aware of a heavy and regular sound, like a ship's pump, coming from somewhere close-by.

In the center of the room is an object that looks like a prop from a '50s sci-fi movie. A human head protrudes from one end. The object is an iron lung, and its purpose is to keep its occupant, Mark O'Brien, breathing. Every 4.5 seconds, the pump mechanism creates a vacuum inside, forcing Mark's chest to expand and suck in air. He is fast asleep.

MARK (V.O.)

Breathing
Look you
This most excellent canopy, the
air,
Presses down upon me
At 15 pounds per square inch
A dense, heavy, blue-glowing ocean.
Teasing me with its nearness and
immensity.
And all I get is a thin stream of
it.
A finger's width of the rope that
ties me to life.

Having now eaten its fill, the cat has a good scratch, then
wanders over to the iron lung.

It hops up onto the small platform that supports Mark's head and slides itself along his face, once this way, once the other way, then jumps on top of the iron lung and walks its length. Through the portholes, we just make out the shape of Mark's bent, undersize body. Suddenly, Mark's nose twitches. He opens his eyes and grimaces.

MARK

Shit!

His face continues to contort as he tries to cope with the terrible itching. He shakes his head violently, then stops suddenly and closes his eyes. We hear his thoughts.

MARK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Okay, just focus. Now, scratch with your mind, okay, your mind, scratch with your mind...

After a couple more nose twitches, he settles down. It seems to have worked. In his peripheral vision, Mark can see the cat making itself comfortable in a corner chair, one of the only other pieces of furniture in the room. The first hints of dawn start to appear through the curtains. They illuminate a large framed portrait of the Virgin Mary hanging on the wall. Mark acknowledges it.

MARK (CONT'D)

Good morning.

Sunlight streams in, making the picture look truly sacred.

4 EXT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY 4

JOAN, a solid but slovenly woman in her late 30s, walks up to Mark's front door, takes a key from her purse and lets herself in.

5 INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY 5

She comes in.

JOAN

Good morning.

Mark does not immediately acknowledge her.

MARK

You're late.

A LITTLE LATER

The center of the iron lung, basically a thin mattress, has been slid out, and Joan is in the process of giving Mark a bed bath. He is frail and helpless.

There is a look of resentment in his eyes as this apparently unfeeling woman exercises total control over him, at least temporarily.

MARK (V.O.)

Joan

I swear this was one crazy bitch
Who'd swing me about enough to
scare me,
But careful enough so she could
say:
"Now what was all the yelling
about? You polios are screamers.
Always were."
I didn't say a word, but typed my
skinny novel in my head,
And thought about revenge.

In the course of washing his private parts, Mark has an involuntary erection. Joan gives him a shriveling look. He feels belittled and humiliated.

A LITTLE LATER

Mark is on his side, his trousers are on and she is buttoning up a bright red shirt. It is an awkward business. They do it in silence, avoiding eye contact as much as possible.

6

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE MARK'S PLACE. DAY

6

Joan pushes Mark along in a gurney, similar, but slightly different from the one in the news clip. There are no mirrors and no motor, just an oxygen tank, a tube and a mouthpiece just next to Mark's mouth. Most of him is covered with a colorful blanket. The whole thing is a sports-coupe version of his iron lung.

JOAN

Would you mind if I asked you a favor?

MARK

You need help moving furniture?

She has no apparent sense of humor.

JOAN

I need an advance on my pay, like two weeks. That's not a big ask, is it?

Mark looks rightfully shocked.

MARK

What if you don't last another two weeks?

He gives her a look, and means it. We hear his thoughts.

MARK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Joan never failed to put me in a
crappy mood. It was also a drag
that I was no longer allowed to use
my other gurney, the self-propelled
one. It had caused a couple of
spectacular accidents.

They turn a corner and approach a church.

MARK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Basically, in spite of all the mirrors, I couldn't see where I was going.

6A EXT. CATHOLIC CHURCH. DAY

6A

Joan pushes Mark's gurney into the sanctuary.

7 INT. CATHOLIC CHURCH. DAY

7

FATHER BRENDAN is giving a sermon. Mark listens with satisfaction. There are not many others there.

FATHER BRENDAN

The Apostle Luke tells us that when Elizabeth spoke to Mary, the baby in her womb leapt - "For lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy". So Mary's fear and apprehension slowly gave way to pride and purpose. Elizabeth saw the greatness in Mary. "Blessed art thou among women". Elizabeth, pregnant herself with St. John, felt the power of this wondrous woman. It was Elizabeth, and her absolute faith, that gave Mary the courage she was lacking, and she gave thanks saying: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour".

May the spirit of the Lord be amongst you and remain with you always.

Mass is over. PEOPLE come up to Mark and place a hand on his head or chest and say, "God bless you." In the background we can also hear Father Brendan.

FATHER BRENDAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

May the peace of the Lord be with you.

PARISHIONERS

And also with you.

A LITTLE LATER

7A INT. SIDE CHAPEL. DAY

7A

Mark waits alone in a tiny chapel off to the side of the church. He turns his head, takes a suck on the mouthpiece of his portable respirator, then looks around at the impressive stained glass windows. The expression on Mark's face is that of a true believer.

MARK (V.O.)

I'm definitely a true believer. But I believe in a God with a sense of humor. A wicked sense of humor. One who created me in His own image.

Father Brendan enters. There is an awkward short moment when he realizes that there is no point in offering to shake hands. For no good reason, he nods instead.

FATHER BRENDAN

Hello. I'm Father Brendan. I don't think we've met.

MARK

No, we haven't. I'm Mark O'Brien. I knew Father Seamus very well. I'm sorry that he's not here any more.

FATHER BRENDAN

As are many others. I'm going to do my best to fill his shoes. I understand you'd like me to hear your confession.

MARK

Yes, I would. By the way, I enjoyed Mass. I liked your tone.

Father Brendan is not sure how to take this.

FATHER BRENDAN

Thank you.

MARK

You don't believe absolute privacy is an essential part of the confessional, do you?

FATHER BRENDAN

No, I do not. I believe sincerity is the most essential part.

MARK

I told my attendant to come back in half an hour. Is that okay?

FATHER BRENDAN

Yes, take your time. I'm in no rush.

MARK

Did Father Seamus say anything to you about me?

FATHER BRENDAN

No one said anything to me about you.

MARK

I can be a bit time consuming, but I'm worth the trouble.

Father Brendan breaks a smile for the first time.

FATHER BRENDAN

I'm here for you Mark.

MARK

Look, this is not exactly a confession. I haven't yet done the deed. I was hoping to sort of get a quote in advance.

Father Brendan sits down.

FATHER BRENDAN

Tell me what's on your mind.

MARK

The most immediate thing on my mind would be my attendant, Joan. I'm thinking of getting rid of her. It's an evil thought, but I can't help it.

FATHER BRENDAN

Is she dishonest, or incompetent?

MARK

No, neither of those. She looks at me the wrong way. It's that you-need-me-more-than-I-need-you look. I'd like to show her she's wrong, just for the evil satisfaction it will give me. Is that a sin, Father?

FATHER BRENDAN

Well, it obviously troubles you.

MARK

Yes, it troubles me a lot. Because maybe it's really a power trip. Me against her. Me against the world.

FATHER BRENDAN

I really wouldn't worry too much about that. The question is whether you like having her around.

MARK

I can't stand her.

FATHER BRENDAN

Then get rid of her. If I were in a position to choose, I'd get someone nice. Even it was a power trip.

MARK

Then I have your blessing to fire her?

FATHER BRENDAN
Unofficially, yes.

MARK
That's good enough for me.

FATHER BRENDAN
Please, if ever you feel I can be
useful, do let me know. It was a
pleasure talking with you.

MARK
Same here.

8 INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY 8

We see a pencil eraser on the end of a stick slowly tapping the keys on an electric typewriter. At the other end of the stick, which is about a foot long, is Mark, manipulating it adeptly with his mouth. There is a white index card in the typewriter on which he is typing a job notice. We see the first word. "POET"

9 EXT. BERKELEY COLLEGE. DAY 9

A community notice board. A young female hand reaches in and takes an index card off the board. The card reads:

POET/JOURNALIST REQUIRES ASSISTANT WITH ADVANCED SENSE OF HUMOR

We see Amanda's face as she smiles. She is in her early 20s.

MARK (V.O.)
Amanda would have been a pretty
girl to touch, to hold, to kiss, to
take to bed.

10 OMITTED 10

11 INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY 11

Mark is in his iron lung. Amanda sits in a stiff chair a few feet away, being interviewed. Rod is working in the kitchen. Mark's poem continues.

MARK (V.O.)
Her perfect, pale skin,
Her Tudor court face
Her strong, fleshy legs
Drove me into ecstasies of despair.

Mark asks a question.

MARK
Do you have any experience?

AMANDA
No, none at all.

MARK
That sounds perfect.

Mark stares at her lovingly.

12 INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY 12

From Mark's POV, Amanda slides him out of the iron lung. It is her first time, and it is an awkward business.

AMANDA
How long can you stay out?

MARK
Three or four hours. Depends
whether I'm having fun.

12A INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY 12A

It is some time later. Amanda is giving Mark a massage. With enormous satisfaction, he feels her curvy parts moving around him and sometimes pressing against him. He also gets a bird's eye view of her breasts.

MARK (V.O.)
She'd count in French before
lifting me, un, deux, trois,
quatre! I'd scream
Tugged by her athletic arms
From the everlasting gravity.

14 EXT. PARK. DAY 14

Mark, on a blanket, is on an outing with Amanda, Matt and another COUPLE. They are playing Scrabble.

MARK (V.O.)

She took me on a picnic once,
With her boyfriend and another
couple. Lust crackled in the air
between those twentyish people.

Amanda is clearly paying more attention to Mark than to Matt.

MARK (V.O.)

What did the boyfriend think?
That I was in his way?
I'm always in somebody's way, I
thought, the sun in my eyes.

We sense Mark's deep satisfaction as he closes his eyes and the sun warms his face.

MARK (V.O.)

As she glided through crowds of
lives She couldn't leave me lying
there Dried out bubble gum stuck on
the underneath of existence.

13 INT. BATHROOM. NIGHT

13

Amanda and her boyfriend MATT, are sharing the tub.

MATT

Do you touch him?

AMANDA

I do everything. Any other
questions?

MATT

You don't have to be so defensive.
I'm not about to get jealous.

AMANDA

Why not? He's a much nicer person
than you are.

She gets out of the bath suddenly.

15 INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY

15

Amanda is shaving Mark.

MARK

What does your boyfriend think of
me?

AMANDA

He's an asshole. It doesn't matter
what he thinks of you.

MARK

I'm interested in the opinion of an
asshole.

AMANDA

He thinks you're some kind of
Svengali, and that you're going to
hypnotise me into your cult.

MARK

He's right.

AMANDA

He says he can already see changes.

She finishes shaving him and cleans him up. His eyes feast on every detail of her face.

Cut to somewhere at night, Amanda is giving Mark a pole dancing demonstration, complete with disco beat and mirror-ball lighting.

MARK (V.O.)

So with her gentle fearless heart
She took me in.
I thrived in her garden
And wanted more.

A16 EXT. STREET NEAR CLOTHING STORE. DAY A16

Amanda wheels Mark towards a clothing store.

16 INT. CLOTHING STORE. DAY 16

Amanda is wheeling Mark in his gurney around the store, stopping from time to time to take something down from the shelf. She picks out a shirt.

AMANDA

This you must have.

As she leans over to show it to him, Mark doesn't seem to be listening. He whispers to her.

MARK

I love you.

She says nothing and gives the faintest of smiles, then puts the shirt back. They continue round the store in thoughtful silence and avoid eye contact with each other. We sense from the looks on their faces that this moment spells the end of a beautiful friendship.

17 OMITTED 17

18 INT. SIDE CHAPEL. DAY 18

Mark and Father Brendan are huddled together in the little chapel.

FATHER BRENDAN

Did she reciprocate your feelings?

MARK

She didn't seem to.

FATHER BRENDAN

Sometimes people can be very shy
about their emotions.

MARK

Well, in case she didn't get it the first time, I told her again that I was in love with her, and wanted to marry her, thinking it might swing things.

FATHER BRENDAN

Did it?

MARK

Yes. She left.

They sit in silence for a while. Father Brendan seems to be at something of a loss.

FATHER BRENDAN

I wish I knew what to say. I mean, welcome to the human race. Every day someone breaks someone else's heart. And as I said, I'm here for you. I just wish I had something more useful to offer. All I have are these vague ideas about life and death that priests are equipped with. Have you ever thought of discussing your feelings with a therapist?

MARK

Not as yet. Father, I think I need a hug.

After a moment of surprise, Father Brendan rises to the occasion. He seems to know how to move Mark gently and efficiently. They hug.

19 EXT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY

19

Rod is in the front yard picking up the newspaper. He sees VERA, Chinese, mid-20s, a sensible type, approaching Mark's front door.

ROD

Hi. Vera?

VERA

Yes.

He offers his hand.

ROD
I'm Rod. I do four to twelve.

20 INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY 20

Vera sits in the same spot where Amanda was interviewed, but without the same aura, although she is far from ugly.

MARK
Have you had any experience?

VERA
Some.

She is reserved and unsmiling. Mark seems disinterested in the whole process. The phone rings. They both look at it.

MARK
Would you get that, please.

Vera picks up the phone and answers a little hesitantly.

VERA
Hullo.

After a few moments, she turns to Mark.

VERA (CONT'D)
It's Sandy, from Pacific News Service.

MARK
Could you press that button and put it on the speakerphone.

She does as she is asked with perfect efficiency.

MARK (CONT'D)
Hi, Sandy.

SANDY (V.O.)
Hi, Mark, how you doing?

MARK
I'm good. I have a new attendant. She answered the phone. Her name's Vera.

SANDY (V.O.)
Welcome, Vera.

VERA
Thank you.

SANDY (V.O.)

Mark, we've gotten sponsorships to do a series on sex and the disabled and we'd like you to do some interviews in the Berkeley area. Could you do that? Say in the next week or so?

Mark is momentarily taken aback.

MARK

Why now?

SANDY (V.O.)

No particular reason. If you're working on something else, then we can talk about it later.

MARK

No, now is fine.

21 EXT. CARMEN'S DRIVEWAY. DAY 21

Vera wheels Mark towards his first interview. The more we see Vera, the more we like her.

MARK (V.O.)

There was no denying it. A door had opened which I could not close, and in invisible writing it said: "Do not enter".

22 INT. CARMEN'S PLACE. DAY 22

We see the slowly rotating reels of a portable cassette recorder. We hear a female voice.

CARMEN (V.O.)

Some positions, like that one, are pretty much impossible.

Carmen, early 30s, is a paraplegic in a wheelchair. She is pretty and animated, and has full use of her hands.

CARMEN

I don't know if you can quite visualize it. It's called a lateral, or sideways reverse cow-girl.

It is obvious that Mark cannot visualize it. Although she doesn't give much away, we sense that Vera can.

CARMEN (CONT'D)

Don't worry about it then. It's
just a question of depth of
penetration.

(MORE)

CARMEN (CONT'D)

To some people it's really important, like my partner, for example. It's not such a big deal for me. I get just as excited when he licks my nipples, if and when he bothers to do it.

Mark looks troubled.

CARMEN (CONT'D)

I think the tape's about to run out.

At that very moment, there is a click, and the tape runs out. Vera flips the tape over, sets it running in record mode, and takes her place again behind Mark's gurney.

CARMEN (CONT'D)

Do you want to keep going?

MARK

Uh, I think I've actually got enough to work on. Thanks.

CARMEN

Get back to me if you need anything else. Oh, and let me give you Greg's phone number. He's full of stuff you wouldn't think was possible.

23 INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY 23

Rod vacuums the floor while Mark taps away on his typewriter. Mark looks troubled.

23A EXT. GREG'S PLACE. DAY 23A

We hear voices.

MARK (V.O.)

Okay, shall we start?

GREG (V.O.)

Sure.

We hear the cassette recorder click on.

23B INT. GREG'S PLACE. DAY 23B

Greg is a handsome quadriplegic. Vera is there with Mark.

GREG

Oral sex is a matter of taste.

Mark doesn't get it. Vera, as usual, is impassive.

GREG (CONT'D)

And one thing that really works in my favor is that I smoke so much weed that my taste buds are pretty jaded. This gives me a great deal of stamina in the tongue department, and stamina is key in cunnilingus.

24 INT. MARK'S PLACE. NIGHT 24

The alley cat creeps in through the open window. Mark watches it approach from his iron lung.

MARK

Who are these people? I feel like an anthropologist interviewing a tribe of headhunters.

The cat seems to understand.

25 EXT. UNIVERSITY ADMIN BUILDING. DAY 25

A lady with a crisp voice answers the phone.

LADY (V.O.)

Good morning. UCSF.

On the other end of the line, Mark tries to control the shakiness of his voice.

MARK (V.O.)

Uh, may I please speak to someone in the Center on Sexuality and Disability, please.

A pause.

LADY (V.O.)

I'm sorry sir, the Center on Sexuality and Disability has been shut down.

26 INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY 26

Mark looks immensely relieved. He closes his eyes.

MARK

Thank God.

LADY (V.O.)

Sir?

MARK

I'm sorry to have bothered you.

LADY (V.O.)

It's no bother...Sir, before you go, I can give you a phone number for one of the therapists who used to work there. Would you like that?

Mark hesitates. He winces under the strain of having to make a decision.

LADY (V.O.)

Sir, are you there?

27 OMITTED 27

28 OMITTED 28

29 EXT. BUILDING. DAY 29

It is a typical, modern, multi-purpose office building. We hear the sounds of grunting, bumping and clanging.

30 INT. LOBBY. DAY 30

There is something of a commotion going on at one of the elevators. Vera, and a small, well-meaning CROWD, are trying to get Mark and his gurney inside. It will not fit horizontally. As they angle it up, Mark begins to panic.

MARK

It won't fit. It's not going to fit. Let's go back.

A muscular LATINO guy reassures him.

LATINO

Hey, it's fine. We got you. This is going to work just fine.

Vera guides him.

VERA

The top has to go over to the left.

MARK

I don't feel so good about this.
Let's forget it.

The Latino guy takes no notice. Vera is flushed and angry.

VERA

Look, do you want to see this woman
or not?

MARK

No!

One more heave and the gurney goes in with a jolt.

MARK (CONT'D)

Aah!

VERA

Well, it's too late.

The elevator doors close.

31 INT. LAURA'S OFFICE. DAY

31

Laura, a well-dressed, attractive woman in her late 30s, sits in a chair a few feet from Mark. His gurney takes up most of the available space in the room.

LAURA

Did you ever discuss sex with your
parents?

MARK

No. That would have been
unthinkable.

LAURA

Why?

MARK

That's the way they saw the world.
It wasn't just that polite people
didn't think about sex. No-one did.
It was never discussed. As far as
they were concerned, there was
nothing down there.

Laura listens. She is pretty in a dark, angular way. A phone
on her desk rings.

LAURA

Sorry about that.

She walks over to it, pushes a button, then comes back. She
has a noticeable limp.

MARK

What's that from?

LAURA

Cerebral palsy.

MARK

You'd hardly notice.

LAURA

People notice. It's not easy, the whole thing, attracting a guy, dating, sex, all very problematic.

MARK

I find that hard to believe in your case.

LAURA

Well, you better believe it.

MARK

So, what sort of chance do you give me?

LAURA

Of achieving your romantic fantasy? Very small to minute.

MARK

Look, there's no need to pull any punches. You can be as direct as you like with me.

She smiles.

LAURA

Mark, I'm just a humble sex therapist. I try to help people with sex problems that can be addressed. Your problem, I understand, is that you have never had sex.

MARK

That's correct.

LAURA

Would I be correct in assuming you're unable to masturbate?

MARK

Correct.

LAURA

Has anyone done it for you?

MARK

No.

LAURA

Have you ever asked anyone?

MARK

Not specifically. I asked someone to marry me. She declined. Does that come close to masturbation?

LAURA

You know, being with the person you love is not the only way of expressing yourself sexually. There are people called sex surrogates.

MARK

Oh?

LAURA

Psychotherapists and psychiatrists are not allowed to have sex with their clients, even if it seems like a good idea. Sex surrogates don't have that limitation.

MARK

Would this be covered by my medical benefits?

LAURA

Unfortunately, no. You'd have to pay the full fee, whatever that was.

MARK

So, basically, I would be paying for sex.

LAURA

Yes Mark, you would be paying for sex. But the person you would be paying is not a hooker. She is a highly trained and sensitive professional, who is not motivated by money. Just as I'm not. In fact, you can think of a surrogate as an extension of me. Do I seem like a hooker to you?

Mark thinks.

31B INT. LAURA'S OFFICE. DAY

31B

Mark comes back to reality.

MARK

What sort of cost would I be
looking at?

LAURA

It depends how many sessions you
need.

MARK

Say, one, just to try it and see if
I like it.

LAURA

I'm sorry, it doesn't work that
way. It's a process. You have to be
patient with yourself. There can be
quite a lot of talking involved.

MARK

I've set aside \$500. Do you think
that would cover things?

LAURA

Oh yes, that's ample. So, what do
you think?

32 INT. CHURCH. DAY 32

Rod wheels Mark into the church.

33 INT. SIDE CHAPEL. DAY 33

Mark waits in the little side chapel. Father Brendan enters.

FATHER BRENDAN

Hi, good to see you. How are things?

MARK

Things are sort of confusing at the moment. I would appreciate your advice, as a friend, if you know what I mean.

Father Brendan sits down on the end of a pew next to Mark.

FATHER BRENDAN

Sure, and I understand what you mean.

MARK

Do you remember at one point you suggested I might see a therapist?

FATHER BRENDAN

Yes.

MARK

Well, one way or another, it's a long story, I ended up seeing a therapist, a particular sort of therapist, a sex therapist.

FATHER BRENDAN

Uh-huh.

MARK

My penis speaks to me, Father Brendan. Sometimes I ejaculate during a bed bath in front of my attendant.

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

All I feel is shame and mortification, while other men, apparently, get pleasure. I'm sorry if I sound angry.

FATHER BRENDAN

Don't worry about it. Go on.

Mark pauses to take a few breaths on his oxygen mouthpiece, then goes on.

MARK

This therapist suggested I could work with a sexual specialist, have sex with someone known as a sex surrogate, who would be sensitive to my special needs. I've been giving it some thought.

Father Brendan interrupts him.

FATHER BRENDAN

Hold on. What do you mean "have sex"?

MARK

Well, I don't really know how to describe...

FATHER BRENDAN

Sorry, that wasn't what... I mean, are we talking about sexual intercourse?

MARK

I think so.

FATHER BRENDAN

Outside marriage?

MARK

I did do my best on the question of marriage.

Father Brendan shakes his head with concern.

FATHER BRENDAN

What is the difference between this sexual specialist and a common prostitute?

MARK

I don't know, but I think there's a difference.

FATHER BRENDAN

How do you know she's not some
hooker gussied up as a social
worker, who's just going to rob
you?

MARK

I trust what my therapist said
about her.

FATHER BRENDAN

How old are you?

MARK

Thirty-eight.

FATHER BRENDAN

Why exactly now?

MARK

I never had any spare cash before.
That's a major factor, and I'm
probably getting close to my use-by
date.

FATHER BRENDAN

And this is what you want my advice
about? Fornication?

MARK

Your advice as a friend.

FATHER BRENDAN

And do I have the casting vote, so
to speak?

MARK

Let's say I value your advice just
as much as I do the therapist's.

FATHER BRENDAN

You're serious, aren't you?

MARK

I think sex is a serious matter.
It's one of the most persistent
themes in the bible.

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

So, is it possible for me to know a woman, in the biblical sense, and do I want to find out?

FATHER BRENDAN

And you want my opinion?

MARK

Please.

Father Brendan contemplates for a few moments. He looks up at the statue of Jesus, then makes a decision.

FATHER BRENDAN

I know in my heart that He'll give you a free pass on this one. Go for it.

MARK

What?

FATHER BRENDAN

I said, go for it.

MARK

Really?

FATHER BRENDAN

If you feel up to it. Do you feel up to it?

MARK

To tell the truth, I'm scared.

FATHER BRENDAN

Then we should pray.

Father Brendan and Mark pray together.

FATHER BRENDAN (CONT'D)

Sweet Jesus, Mark and I sit at your feet and pray that You bless this little journey, this one small step for a man.

34 OMITTED

34

35 OMITTED

35

36	OMITTED	36
37	OMITTED	37
37A	OMITTED	37A
38	EXT. STREET NEAR CARMEN'S. DAY	38

ROD is wheeling Mark along in his gurney.

MARK

I really feel proud of myself,
imposing on someone I hardly know,
to fornicate in their home.

ROD

Get over it. It's perfectly normal.

They arrive at CARMEN'S PLACE.

39 INT. CARMEN'S PLACE. DAY 39

Carmen, in her electric wheelchair, is the woman Mark had earlier interviewed. She pushes a button on a remote control, which opens concertina double-doors, which reveal an adjacent bedroom.

CARMEN

Tada!

The bed itself is set at a perfect height for someone in a wheelchair or gurney. The room has been decked out with flowers, candles and incense.

MARK

Wow!

Carmen points to the bedside table.

CARMEN

There are all sorts of useful things in that drawer there, if you guys feel like exploring.

Mark doesn't even begin to get it.

MARK

No, I'll bring my own sheets, towels and anything else we need.

CARMEN

No, no. Everything will be provided. I'm honored that you asked me. It'll be great karma for the house.

40 EXT. STREET NEAR CARMEN'S. DAY 40

Rod is wheeling Mark back home.

MARK

Great karma for the house. My God, the pressure, already. I can't stand it.

41 OMITTED 41

42 OMITTED 42

43 OMITTED 43

44 EXT. STREET. DAY 44

We are outside an old-style wooden house with a Volvo wagon parked in front. A phone rings.

45 INT. CHERYL'S KITCHEN. DAY 45

We hear the sound of sneakers on a wood floor. TONY, an adolescent with a pony tail picks up the phone.

TONY
Hey, this is Tony.

He listens, then looks away from the phone and shouts.

TONY (CONT'D)
Cheryl!

CHERYL (V.O.)
What is it?

TONY
Phone!

He talks into the mouthpiece.

TONY (CONT'D)
She's coming.

CHERYL arrives. She is in her mid-30s. She grabs the phone, puts her hand over the mouthpiece and glares at Tony.

CHERYL
I'm not your girlfriend. When someone calls, particularly someone you don't know, you can use the word 'Mom'.

Tony glares back. Cheryl takes off her right earring.

CHERYL (CONT'D)
Hullo, this is Cheryl.

LAURA (V.O.)
Hi, it's Laura.

CHERYL
I haven't heard from you in a while. How are you?

LAURA (V.O.)
Pretty well. Look, I called to ask how you would feel about working with a severely disabled client.

Suddenly, Cheryl notices that Tony has opened the refrigerator and is drinking straight out of the orange juice bottle.

CHERYL
Hold on a moment, please.

She covers the mouthpiece of the phone.

CHERYL (CONT'D)
Hey, cut that out!

He takes no notice. She puts the phone down and moves towards him. He closes the fridge door and runs.

46 INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY 46

Mark is having a bed bath. His shoulders and neck are covered with soap suds. Rod is washing his back. The phone rings.

MARK
Would you get it please?

ROD
Sure.

Rod eases Mark back onto the rubber mattress and goes to answer the phone.

ROD (CONT'D)
Hullo, Mark O'Brien's phone.

He switches it to speaker so Mark can hear.

CHERYL (V.O.)
Hi, this is Cheryl Cohen-Greene.
May I speak to Mark?

Rod holds the phone toward Mark like a question. Mark's face looks drained of blood.

ROD
Just one moment, please.

Rod switches the phone off speaker.

ROD (CONT'D)
What am I doing here? Yes or no?
Make up your mind.

Mark hesitates, then nods weakly. Rod puts the phone back on speaker.

MARK
Hullo, this is Mark.

CHERYL (V.O.)
Hi, Mark. I'm Cheryl. Laura called
to introduce you. I understand
you'd like to meet. Is that right?

Mark can hardly speak. He eventually forces the sound from his throat.

MARK
Uh, yes.

CHERYL (V.O.)
I could see you on the seventeenth,
at eleven o'clock. Would that be
any good for you?

MARK
Uh, yes, I think that would be fine
for me.

CHERYL
Hey, where you from?

MARK
Boston. You?

CHERYL
Salem. Small world.

MARK
Wouldn't want to paint it.

47 INT. CHERYL'S KITCHEN. DAY

47

Cheryl is on the phone, holding the receiver with one hand while she puts away groceries with the other.

CHERYL

We'll be talking for a while to
begin with. Then, if you agree, we
can also start doing some body
awareness exercises in your first
session.

48 INT. MARK'S PLACE. NIGHT

48

The iron lung pumps away. Mark is alone. He stares at the
picture of the Virgin Mary.

MARK

Holy Mother of God, what are "body awareness exercises"?

49 EXT. STREET OUTSIDE MARK'S PLACE. DAY 49

Vera lets herself in.

50 INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY 50

Vera holds up two shirts for Mark to see, a dark red and a light blue.

VERA

Which one?

Mark is lying on his side, shirtless. His face is even more grim than when we last saw it.

MARK

Doesn't matter.

VERA

Will you stop acting as if you're going to your own execution.

MARK

I'm not acting.

51 EXT. CARMEN'S DRIVEWAY. DAY 51

Vera wheels Mark to his doom.

VERA

Try and think of something else. Baseball, for example. That's what they usually tell boys to do.

MARK

Who are "they"?

Vera rings the front doorbell. They wait.

MARK (CONT'D)

She's forgotten.

Vera says nothing. She rings the bell again.

MARK (CONT'D)

My God, she's forgotten, or she's gotten the date wrong. Okay, we might as well turn round and go back. Come on, let's go.

VERA

She hasn't forgotten.

From inside the house, we hear the faint buzz of an electric wheelchair approaching. The door opens. Mark closes his eyes in despair.

52

OMITTED

52

53 INT. CARMEN'S PLACE. DAY

53

Vera eases Mark onto the bed, positioning him so that he can see the doorway. As a finishing touch, she dabs a little cologne behind his ears, then puts the mouthpiece of his respirator within easy reach.

Carmen picks up her bag and wheels herself to the door.

CARMEN

Okay, I'm going. I'll be back some time after one. If I'm not here, just let yourselves out.

VERA

Bye.

MARK

(weakly)

Bye.

CARMEN

Have fun.

She lets herself out.

MARK

What's the time?

VERA

Twelve after eleven.

MARK

I think there's a strong possibility she's had second thoughts.

VERA

Mark, please calm down.

MARK

And if she does arrive, she would be perfectly within her rights to turn around and run.

The doorbell rings. They stare at the door. Vera finally goes over and opens it. Silhouetted against the light is Cheryl with a substantial bag. She could be the Avon lady. She has a light blouse, light skirt and her long hair is loose.

CHERYL

Hi, I'm Cheryl. I'm sorry I'm late.

VERA

No, that's fine. Come in. I'm Vera, I'm one of Mark's helpers.

Cheryl sees Mark. There is no noticeable reaction in her face, just a smile.

CHERYL

Hi, Mark O'Brien.

Mark clears his throat with a little difficulty.

MARK

Hi, Cheryl Cohen Greene.

Vera is already at the front door.

VERA

I'll be back, say, in two hours?

CHERYL

Yes, two hours, that would be perfect.

She closes the door behind her. Mark feels totally abandoned.

CHERYL (CONT'D)

So...

Mark blurts out.

MARK

Your money's on the dresser.

Cheryl walks over to the dresser. When her back is turned, Mark screws up his face in self-disgust. She finds an envelope.

CHERYL

Thank you.

She puts it in her bag. Mark eyes her carefully.

MARK

That was the wrong way to start off.

CHERYL

Yes, it was. Shall we start again?

MARK

Please, you start.

She sits down on the bed and looks at him. It is a very frank stare. She is trying to take a lot in.

CHERYL

Although the aim is for us to have sex, I'm not a prostitute and you don't need to pay me up front. I've nothing against prostitutes, but there's a difference. We can talk about that later.

MARK

I'm sorry.

CHERYL

The other thing is, there is a limit to the number of sessions we can have together. Did Laura mention that when you saw her?

MARK

I'm sorry, I don't remember.

CHERYL

The limit is six. But that gives us plenty of opportunity to explore. Now, I understand you are able to have an erection.

MARK

Yes, but not out of choice.

CHERYL

Do you know how many men there are on this planet who would give anything for a natural erection?

She looks around the room.

CHERYL (CONT'D)

Is this your place?

MARK

No, it's a friend's. The only bedroom furniture I have at my place is an iron lung. I've sometimes thought about buying a futon, in case the need arose.

CHERYL

It's worth thinking about.

MARK

I've got the space. It can be expensive though, a nice futon. I mean, how much do you think a good one would cost?

CHERYL

Mark, just take a deep breath, then let go.

MARK

Do I seem anxious?

CHERYL

You do a little.

Cheryl lies down beside him.

CHERYL (CONT'D)

Laura told me you were a poet. What's it like to be a poet?

MARK

It's a way of living inside your own head, which is where I spend most of my time.

CHERYL

But not today. By the way, I like your shirt.

He smiles, genuinely flattered.

MARK

Thank you.

CHERYL

So I need to ask you some basic questions. Okay?

MARK

Sure.

CHERYL

What is the iron lung for?

MARK

It keeps me breathing. I can spend a few hours outside of it, with my portable respirator, depending on how I feel. But I work and sleep in the iron lung.

CHERYL

How do you feel right now?

MARK
Out of my league.

CHERYL
I meant your breathing.

MARK
Oh...fine. In fact, better than
usual.

CHERYL
That's great. Do you have any areas
of unusual sensitivity? Any parts
of your body you don't want me to
touch?

MARK
I have normal sensitivity all over.
It's just that my muscles don't
work. You can touch me anywhere.

CHERYL
Shall we get undressed then?

Mark is taken by surprise by the suddenness of it. He
hesitates momentarily.

MARK
Sure.

Cheryl starts to unbutton his shirt. Mark's terror is visible
in his eyes and she can also feel his heart palpitating. She
starts to slowly extract one of Mark's arms from his shirt-
sleeve. Suddenly, he lets out a piercing scream.

MARK (CONT'D)
Ow! Ow! Stop! It hurts!

She recoils, shocked.

CHERYL
What's wrong?

MARK
Holy Mother of God!

CHERYL
Tell me what's wrong.

MARK
My fingers! They're caught!

She discovers that his fingers have been snagged in the
fabric of the shirt and his fingers are being bent backward.

CHERYL

Okay, okay, I've got it. Don't worry.

She carefully frees his fingers and eases the sleeve off.

MARK

Be careful, please.

CHERYL

Mark, I'm going to be really careful with you. I don't want to hurt or injure you in any way, but it's really not sexy when you yell at me. Okay?

MARK

I won't yell at you any more.

CHERYL

But you'll tell me calmly the moment anything starts to hurt?

MARK

Yes.

CHERYL

Now, let's do the other arm.

Little by little, she extracts the other arm. He grimaces his way through it, but more in fear than in pain. She finally sets his shirt down on the end of the bed.

CHERYL (CONT'D)

Nice shirt.

MARK

You already said that.

CHERYL

Did I? I guess I'm a little anxious, too.

She undoes the top of his pants.

CHERYL (CONT'D)

Okay, I'm going to slide these down. Hold your breath.

She pulls. He screams, in fear more than pain.

MARK

Shit, fuck! No, don't do that!

54 INT. BATHROOM. DAY

54

Cheryl sits down on the edge of the tub and takes a couple of deep breaths.

55 INT. CARMEN'S PLACE. DAY 55

Mark, his body now under the sheets, looks towards the bathroom door. He can hear the sound of water running. He looks at a wall clock and notes the passing of time.

56 INT. BATHROOM. DAY 56

Cheryl turns off the tap. She has done a great job of pulling herself together, and is wrapped in a kimono, which she has brought herself.

57 INT. CARMEN'S PLACE. DAY 57

Cheryl emerges from the bathroom and starts to undress.

CHERYL

Ready?

MARK

No.

Cheryl continues undressing, Mark looks away.

CHERYL

Okay, the difference between me and a prostitute is that I don't want your return business. I'm here to help you communicate about your sexual feelings, so you can share them with a future partner.

She stands there for a few moments, but he keeps his eyes averted. She turns back the sheets, gets into bed beside him and he finally looks at her.

MARK

Whenever I'm naked, everyone else in the room is usually dressed. Now that I'm in bed with another naked person, I'm very confused.

She strokes his hair.

CHERYL

So, why is it confusing?

MARK

I'd always expected that God, or my parents, would intervene to keep this moment from happening.

She slides her hand down. She can feel his heart thumping.

CHERYL

Mark, close your eyes and focus on your sense of touch.

He closes his eyes.

CHERYL (CONT'D)

I'd like you to tell me how it feels each time I touch a different part of your body. If something feels good, tell me. If something feels ticklish or bothers you, let me know. I don't want you to tolerate anything. I'm going to start with the top of your head...

She strokes his hair.

CHERYL (CONT'D)

You have soft hair. It's nice to the touch. So you like it?

MARK

I do.

She moves her fingers round behind his ear, then the front of his ear.

MARK (CONT'D)

That feels weird.

CHERYL

Weird good? Or weird bad?

MARK

Just weird.

She moves her hand down his neck.

MARK (CONT'D)

Good.

His shoulder.

CHERYL

Still good?

MARK

Everything good so far, except the ear.

She moves her fingers along his side, very, very lightly. For Mark, so far, this is the best.

MARK (CONT'D)

Are these the body awareness
exercises?

CHERYL

You're clever to have worked that out.

Her hands massage their way down his torso. Mark's reactions are a little like shock waves.

MARK

People tell me I'm very perceptive.

CHERYL

Would you like to see what I feel like?

She carefully takes his hand and caresses the fingers around one of her breasts, then puts his hand back.

Cheryl's hands move further down his body.

CHERYL (CONT'D)

Are you wearing cologne?

MARK

Yes.

CHERYL

Mmm, my favorite brand. Okay, I'm going to move my hand along your stomach... and down to your pen...

The expression on Mark's face changes to one of shock, then agony, then ecstasy.

MARK

Oh, oh.

58 OMITTED 58

59 INT. CARMEN'S PLACE. DAY 59

The clock on the mantelpiece says 12:48. Cheryl is now fully dressed. She snaps open her briefcase, takes out a diary with a pen attached, then walks over to the bed, sits down beside Mark and flips through the pages.

CHERYL

Next week, Friday the twentieth, same time?

MARK

That's good for me.

CHERYL

Next time we'll start to work on
intercourse.

She gathers her things together and gets up.

CHERYL (CONT'D)

Were you afraid at the thought of
seeing me?

MARK

I was terrified.

CHERYL

You can be proud of yourself. You
did great. We've made real
progress.

MARK

Can I ask you something?

CHERYL

Of course. What would you like to
ask?

MARK

Anything, really. Tell me something
about yourself. Anything.

CHERYL

Sure. I'm a very private person. I
have a private life, I do need you
to be aware of that, but that's
about it. This therapy is about
you.

There is a discreet knock at the front door and then a key
turns in the lock. A few moments later, Carmen and Vera come
in.

MARK

Welcome back.

CHERYL

Perfect timing.

CARMEN

I hope you guys kept the noise
down.

60

EXT. STREET NEAR CARMEN'S. DAY

60

Vera wheels Mark back the way they came. She is very discreet
and they travel in silence for a while. Finally, curiosity
overcomes her.

VERA

How do you feel?

MARK

Cleansed and victorious.

VERA

Doesn't get any better than that.

MARK

Tell me about your first sexual experience.

VERA

Let me think. It wasn't all that pleasant. I mean, it was consensual and everything, and I really was in love with the guy, but his dick seemed enormous to me, I didn't think it would fit. It was scary. But he was nice. I guess he couldn't help it.

MARK

Was he Chinese?

VERA

Are you kidding? I only hung out with white guys at high school.

MARK

Why is that?

VERA

I don't know. To stick it to my mum and dad, I suppose.

MARK

Are they happy now you've got a Chinese boyfriend?

VERA

They're happy. I'm happy.

MARK

What's his dick like?

VERA

Perfect size.

MARK

Why do you call it a dick instead of a penis?

VERA

Penis sounds like some vegetable
you don't want to eat. Dick sounds
like what it is.

They continue in silence for a little while.

MARK

The thing is, it was all over so
damn quickly.

VERA

Yes, tell me about it.

61 EXT. CHERYL'S PLACE. NIGHT 61

Cheryl's car is parked outside. The house is mostly dark.

62 INT. CHERYL'S PLACE. NIGHT 62

Cheryl is at a tiny desk, dictating into a recorder.

CHERYL

First session. Mark is the oldest
of four children and raised
Catholic. He was extremely nervous.
He yelled a lot when I took off his
shirt, but I think more out of fear
than pain. He cannot masturbate.
Has only had the occasional kissing
experience. He is capable of
achieving an erection easily, but
the unusual curvature of his body
could be a serious obstacle to
intercourse.

She puts the recorder away in a file drawer and locks the
drawer with a key, which she keeps with her.

63 INT. CHERYL'S BEDROOM. NIGHT 63

Cheryl gets into bed beside her husband JOSH, who is
apparently asleep.

CHERYL

This gentleman I just started
working with. He spends most of his
life trapped in a big metal box.

Her husband Josh turns over and mumbles something completely
incomprehensible. She nudges him.

CHERYL (CONT'D)

Did you hear what I said?

JOSH

Yes, I heard what you said. You're a saint.

He kisses her.

CHERYL

Don't forget to put the trash out in the morning.

She turns around and goes to sleep.

64 INT. SIDE CHAPEL. DAY

64

Mark is in the little side chapel with Father Brendan.

MARK

I don't know what I had envisaged it would be like, the first time I mean. But that wasn't the image I had. I thought there would be more to it. Not that it was unpleasant. After all, I was in bed with a naked woman. She complimented me on my shirt and my hair. She held my penis. I haven't even seen my penis for over thirty years. Anyway, onward. Am I sharing too much?

FATHER BRENDAN

No, I'm used to it.

65 INT. MARK'S PLACE. NIGHT

65

Mark is in his iron lung. With his mouth stick, he turns the page of one of those anatomical instruction books on sex. There are the typical graphic cross-section diagrams of penises entering vaginas. Ravel's "Bolero" plays quietly in the background as he reads to himself.

MARK

"Sometimes the head of the penis may be too large to penetrate the vaginal opening smoothly, in which case the application of lubricant is recommended to avoid possible..." Oh, my God!

66 EXT. STREET OUTSIDE MARK'S PLACE. DAY

66

This time Rod is wheeling Mark. He seems only slightly less anxious than the first time, but still noticeably anxious.

ROD

What's on the menu today?

MARK

We're attempting intercourse.

ROD

Uh-huh. That's a big one.

MARK

What do you think of it?
Intercourse.

ROD

Overrated, but necessary. There's
plenty of other ways of achieving
the same result, but somehow you
don't feel you've actually done it
till you've gone all the way in.

This does not help Mark's state of mind.

67 OMITTED

67

68 INT. CARMEN'S PLACE. DAY

68

Cheryl takes off her clothes.

CHERYL

I want you to look at me this time.
Go on, lift your eyes, look at me.

He lifts his eyes. She pauses.

CHERYL (CONT'D)

Do you like watching me undress?

MARK

I do.

As she moves towards the bed, almost naked, the last thing
she takes off is her bra.

CHERYL

From now on...

She pulls back the bed covers and gets into bed with Mark.

CHERYL (CONT'D)

You're going to start to understand
the signals from your body...

Their bodies touch. He looks blissful.

CHERYL (CONT'D)

...and learn how to control...

Then suddenly...

MARK

Oh God! Oh God!

Mark's expression of bliss turns to one of anger and frustration.

MARK (CONT'D)

Damn! Shit!

69 INT. SIDE CHAPEL. DAY

69

Mark is in the side chapel with Father Brendan.

MARK

I did it again. This time, I ejaculated on her thigh.

Father Brendan winces.

MARK (CONT'D)

I felt cursed, that the whole enterprise was cursed. It seemed like a totally just punishment. God wasn't actually denying my sexuality. He was merely pointing out to me how useless it was.

FATHER BRENDAN

It's amazing to me how often God is brought into the sex act. I understand that even amongst non-believers, the most common expression of sexual ecstasy is "Oh, God!"

70 OMITTED

70

71 OMITTED

71

72 INT. CARMEN'S PLACE. DAY

72

Cheryl returns from the bathroom and slides back into bed.

CHERYL

Okay, I don't want to hear any more about God cursing you. I want the credit. It was my overpowering beauty that did it. It took you by surprise. Now, where were we?

MARK

What do you mean, where were we?

CHERYL

I'm going to touch you... I'm touching you... and when we both feel you're aroused, then I'm going to guide you into my vagina.

MARK

Is there anything I need to do?

CHERYL

Close your eyes, feel your body,
that's all you need to do.

Mark closes his eyes. In his mind's eye, he sees the saintly figures in the beautiful stained glass windows of the church with the afternoon sun blazing through. An equally saintly, but naked Amanda floats towards him, her arms beckoning.

When he opens his eyes, Cheryl is straddling him, but in a Leaning Tower of Pisa sort of way. It is a struggle for her, but somehow she is managing to get Mark into a workable position for intercourse. Suddenly, he panics.

MARK

It won't fit. It's not going to
fit.

CHERYL

No, Mark, it will fit just fine.

MARK

No, it's dangerous. It's too big.

CHERYL

It's not too big. Relax.

MARK

It won't fit. It'll hurt. It's too
risky.

CHERYL

Please, stop this. I promise you,
nothing bad will happen. Now, let's
try again while you're still hard.

She attempts to guide him in again. Mark grimaces, makes a strange noise. We realize that he has just ejaculated again involuntarily.

MARK

Shit!

73 INT. BATHROOM. DAY

73

Cheryl steps out of the shower.

74 INT. CARMEN'S PLACE. DAY

74

Cheryl gets into bed.

MARK

I'm really sorry.

CHERYL

Stop being sorry. And stop reading those stupid sex manuals.

She snuggles up beside Mark.

CHERYL (CONT'D)

We still have some time. We can talk, which you seem to like, or you can suck on my nipples, which you also seem to like. Or, which one would you like to do first?

Gradually, Mark is reassured.

75 EXT. CHERYL'S PLACE. NIGHT 75

Cheryl's Volvo is parked in its usual spot out front. There is one light on in the house.

76 INT. CHERYL'S PLACE. NIGHT 76

Cheryl is at her desk, dictating her notes. She also has a notepad with some jottings.

CHERYL

Mark seemed to be at his most relaxed when I sucked his penis. At the moment he is fixated on penis-vagina and his anxiety is focused around that. The root of his anxiety is his parents and his religion. He believes he doesn't deserve sex. He believes he is responsible for his little sister's death at the age of seven, because his mother was too busy looking after him.

77 INT. LAURA'S OFFICE. DAY 77

A copy of Cheryl's notes comes through on Laura's fax machine. We hear her familiar limp as she comes over to collect them. She reads the notes with interest.

CHERYL (V.O.)

We discussed his fantasies. They are mostly masochistic.

(MORE)

CHERYL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Again, the idea of being punished.
He has never seen female genitalia
before and seems quite frightened
by the idea.

78 INT. SIDE CHAPEL. DAY

78

Mark and Father Brendan are in the little chapel.

MARK

I'm sorry to lay all this on you,
Father. My worry now is that it's
never going to happen. I'm never
going to have intercourse with
Cheryl, or any other woman. Maybe
intercourse would prove I was an
adult. Maybe I don't want to cross
that line. Maybe this was a bad
idea.

FATHER BRENDAN

Do you want to know what I think?

MARK

Please.

FATHER BRENDAN

I'd forget the psychobabble. I grew
up on a farm. It even takes the
animals a few times to get it
right. Can I suggest you try and
enjoy it more? Don't worry about
the technical stuff. You're a poet.
Be romantic.

79 EXT. CLOTHING STORE. DAY

79

Vera wheels Mark and his gurney to a rack in front of the
store. She takes shirts and models them for Mark. He settles
on a daring but beautiful silk shirt. A man in a pink unitard
rides by on a unicycle.

80 OMITTED

80

81 INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY

81

Vera carefully does up the buttons on Mark's new silk shirt.
Mark looks thoughtful.

VERA

You nervous?

MARK

Only a little.

VERA
Would you like a shpritz?

MARK
Yes, of course I would.

Vera gets a bottle of cologne and gives Mark a couple of bursts behind the ears.

MARK (CONT'D)
I have a good feeling about today,
a very good feeling.

VERA
Great.

MARK
I had a terrible feeling it was
never going to happen, but I think
today's the day.

VERA
Can I make a suggestion?

MARK
Please.

VERA
Stop thinking about it.

82 OMITTED 82

83 EXT. CARMEN'S DRIVEWAY. DAY 83

Vera wheels Mark up to the front door.

MARK
You couldn't have wished for nicer
weather.

VERA
You're not listening, are you? I
said, stop thinking about it.

MARK
Beautiful weather.

She steps up to ring the bell, then hesitates. There is something of a hubbub coming from inside. Both she and Mark can hear it clearly.

84 INT. CARMEN'S PLACE. DAY 84

The doorbell rings, amidst a loud background chatter. We reveal a ROOMFUL OF WOMEN, gathered for some intense group activity of some kind. Carmen buzzes her way to the front door in her wheelchair. She opens it. She has an expression of horror.

CARMEN

Oh, my God, I forgot! Oh, Mark, I'm so sorry.

The entire roomful of women stare at Mark and Vera. In the background we see Cheryl's car pull up.

85 EXT. CARMEN'S PLACE. DAY 85

Cheryl, Mark and Vera are by the car. Mark looks grim.

VERA

She was very apologetic.

They are all shaking their heads. Cheryl has a thought.

CHERYL

Look, it may not be exactly what we had in mind, but I noticed there's quite a nice motel just a couple of blocks from here. Maybe it's worth checking out.

86 INT. MOTEL RECEPTION. DAY 86

Mark and Cheryl wait outside while Vera goes in.

VERA

Have you got anything on the ground floor?

The MOTEL CLERK is also Chinese. He looks at the rack of keys.

CLERK

I've got a single.

VERA

How much?

CLERK

Thirty-five plus tax.

VERA

My boss is the gentleman in the gurney.

(MORE)

VERA (CONT'D)

He's supposed to be having a therapy session right now, but the facility we normally use had a scheduling mix-up. We only need the room for two hours. Can you do it for twenty cash?

87 EXT. MOTEL. DAY

87

The clerk leads them to the room and opens the door.

CLERK

There's a soda machine around the corner.

MARK

Thanks.

CLERK

And an ice machine, if you need it.

MARK

I'm sure it'll come in handy.

88 INT. MOTEL ROOM. DAY

88

Cheryl, Vera and the gurney enter the room. The clerk watches in the background. Cheryl and Vera lower Mark onto the bed. Allowing for the gurney, there is not a lot of space left in the room.

VERA

Okay, I'll see you. I've got a book to read. I'll just hang around the reception if you need me.

Vera leaves. Mark looks around.

MARK

Very atmospheric.

CHERYL

Some people find motels exciting.

MARK

Do you think I could be one of those people?

She sits on the bed and starts to undo his shirt.

CHERYL

Another nice shirt.

MARK

As in racy and sophisticated?

CHERYL

You took the words right out of my mouth.

89 INT. MOTEL RECEPTION. DAY

89

Vera is having coffee with the clerk.

CLERK

What's wrong with your boss?

VERA

Basically, he can only move his head.

CLERK

So what sort of therapy are they doing?

VERA

They're having sex.

CLERK

You're bullshitting me.

VERA

Okay, I'm bullshitting you.

CLERK

No, tell me for real, what are they actually doing?

VERA

Well, today, after some appropriate foreplay, they're going to try to achieve full penetration.

The clerk stares at her.

90 INT. MOTEL ROOM. DAY

90

We see Cheryl from the breasts up. We hear violent coughing from down below.

MARK (V.O.)

I'm choking

Cheryl moves away. We realize she has been perched astride his face, more or less. The coughing continues. Mark looks a bit panicked.

MARK

The mouth-piece.

Cheryl locates the mouth-piece to his oxygen supply and puts it between his lips. After a few breaths he is relatively relaxed. She lies down beside him.

CHERYL

I guess that one's off the menu
until further notice.

Mark finally lets go of the mouth-piece. He looks melancholy. She does not fail to notice.

CHERYL (CONT'D)

Come on, lighten up, will you.

Mark smiles. He seems to be lost in some memory.

MARK

Pony girl, Pony girl,
Won't you be my pony girl?

He looks at Cheryl.

MARK (CONT'D)

That was what my father used to
sing to my little sister, Karin.
That was before she died. She was
kind of a sad little girl. It
didn't do much good. I'm really
sorry that the last time I saw her,
I fought with her. I made her cry.

Mark's eyes begin to look teary.

MARK (CONT'D)

My parents could have left me in
the nursing home, you know. They
found out the average life
expectancy for polios in nursing
homes was 18 months. So they took
me home. They gave me a life.

Cheryl props herself up on one elbow.

CHERYL

Mark, I'm just going to go the
bathroom for a quick pee. When I
come back, we're going to achieve
full penetration. But before I go,
I want you to close your eyes.

MARK

Is this a game?

CHERYL

No, it's not a game. Just do as I
say. Close your eyes.

He closes his eyes.

CHERYL (CONT'D)

Picture yourself as a six year old boy at the beach. Can you do that?

MARK

Yes, very easily.

91 EXT. BEACH. DAY

91

The scene has a hazy, dreamlike reality. We see the six-year old Mark, able-bodied and full of energy, running and playing in the sand with his dog.

92 INT. MOTEL ROOM. DAY

92

CHERYL

Describe some of your feelings.

MARK

I feel very exhilarated, running next to the Atlantic Ocean, feeling the wind and the wet sand between my toes.

CHERYL

Do you really feel like him?

MARK

Yes, I really feel like him.

CHERYL

But can you really picture him?

MARK

I don't understand what you mean. I said I can feel like him. Of course I can picture him.

CHERYL

From the outside, I mean, as an adult, as you are now, looking at him with his crew cut and his little face?

MARK

Yes.

CHERYL

And are you mad at him? Do you blame him for getting polio? Was it his fault?

Cheryl gets up and goes to the bathroom. Mark is obviously affected by her question.

93 INT. SIDE CHAPEL. DAY 93

Mark has a faraway look.

MARK

She either forgot to close the bathroom door, or didn't bother to close it.

Mark pauses as he hears some distant footsteps. Father Brendan looks over his shoulder. They finally pass. Mark continues.

MARK (CONT'D)

I found the sound of her peeing incredibly erotic, and the sound of her tearing off toilet paper incredibly intimate. By the time she came back I had a terrific boner.

94 INT. MOTEL ROOM. DAY 94

Cheryl gets herself into position on top of Mark.

CHERYL

I'm going to rub the tip of your cock around my vulva. When it's ready, I'll guide you in. Breathe slowly and think of something delicious.

Mark thinks. Through his mind's eye, we see a succession of images. Fingertips stroking a cat's fur. In the background, the sound of tom-toms. A tribal initiation rite. Drums, dancing, trances. Then Ravel's "Bolero". Clint Eastwood saying "make my day". Suddenly, and with a big yell, Mark comes.

MARK

Aahh!

95 INT. MOTEL RECEPTION. DAY 95

Vera is still there, reading her book. The clerk looks at his watch.

CLERK

They've been in there a long time.

VERA

Yes, some people can do that.

He does not get it.

CLERK

Do you want another coffee?

VERA

No thanks.

CLERK

Do you live with your parents?

VERA

No.

CLERK

You at Berkeley?

VERA

Uh-huh.

CLERK

Doing what?

VERA

Architecture.

CLERK

You have a boyfriend?

VERA

Yes. Do you?

96 INT. MOTEL ROOM. DAY

96

Mark and Cheryl are lying together. He has his eyes closed.
There is something on her mind.

CHERYL

You awake?

MARK

Uh-huh.

CHERYL

To answer your earlier question, I grew up in Salem, brought up Catholic, like you, but the church didn't appreciate my attitude towards sex.

MARK

You had an attitude towards sex?

CHERYL

Yes, I liked it. They like to think they threw me out, but I threw them out. So for years I didn't believe in anything, and now I'm converting to Judaism.

MARK

I guess it's good to have some kind of insurance.

CHERYL

I didn't think of that.

MARK

Then why are you doing it?

CHERYL

My husband asked me to do it before his grandmother dies. The idea is, if it makes her happy and him happy, then it will do the same for me. Our son is neutral on the subject, but theoretically, if it looks like it makes me happy, it'll make him happy too. That's the way my husband's family talks, and thinks. The fact that I'm happy already, doesn't seem to be relevant.

MARK

What's your son's name?

CHERYL

Tony. He's 14 years-old and very smart. You'd like him.

Cheryl and Mark lie together in contented silence for a while.

MARK

Does he know what you do?

CHERYL

He knows I'm a sex therapist.
There's a certificate on the wall.
But he hasn't had sex yet. So...
How much can he really know? He's
not a boy, he's not a man.

MARK

How much do you want him to know?

CHERYL

Well, I want him to have some idea
in his head. I hope it's a nice
one.

MARK

What does your husband do?

CHERYL

He's a philosopher.

MARK

Wow! You mean, like, at a university?

CHERYL

No, in his own mind. He runs the house, plays guitar, thinks a lot.

She notices the time.

CHERYL (CONT'D)

It's kind of late.

She gets up and starts to get dressed.

CHERYL (CONT'D)

Hey, we did really good stuff today. You were fantastic. You're a fully fledged male homo sapiens endowed with a handsome and substantial penis which now has a proven track record. You should be pleased.

MARK

Was I really inside you?

CHERYL

You were really and truly inside me.

MARK

For how long?

CHERYL

Five or six seconds.

MARK

Is that all?

CHERYL

That's a long time for some people. You were pretty excited. I don't know what you were thinking about.

MARK

I'm sorry, I couldn't tell one thing from another. It was all a jumble of sensations.

CHERYL

Well, you definitely achieved penetration. It was penis-vagina all the way. And you definitely get an A for orgasm.

She is ready to go. She comes over to Mark and kisses him on the cheek.

MARK

Did you come?

CHERYL

No, Mark, I didn't.

MARK

Can we try for that next time?

She hesitates for a moment.

CHERYL

If that's what you want.

MARK

Yes, that's what I want.

CHERYL

Okay then.

97 INT. LAURA'S OFFICE. DAY 97

Laura is on the phone to Cheryl.

LAURA

How's it going?

98 INT. CHERYL'S PLACE. DAY 98

Cheryl is at her desk.

CHERYL

He reads too many books. He has it in his head that after meeting three times, we should be able to have penetrative sex which results in simultaneous orgasm. Boom! Just like that.

99 INT. LAURA'S OFFICE. DAY 99

LAURA

That's very funny.

100 INT. CHERYL'S PLACE. DAY 100

CHERYL
I guess. Yes, it is.

LAURA (V.O.)
What do you think of him?

Cheryl thinks.

101 INT. LAURA'S OFFICE. DAY 101

LAURA
I said, what do you think of him?

CHERYL (V.O.)
I like him.

102 EXT. STREET OUTSIDE MARK'S PLACE. NIGHT 102

Father Brendan approaches and arrives at the front door. He rings. Rod lets him in.

103 INT. MARK'S PLACE. NIGHT 103

Mark is in his iron lung. Father Brendan, wearing civilian clothes, comes in with a 6 pack of beer.

FATHER BRENDAN
I was in the neighborhood. How are you?

MARK
Still exhausted.

FATHER BRENDAN
So, on reflection, are you...
Fulfilled?

MARK
It was okay. I liked some of the other things just as much, or better, but I'm glad it's behind me.

FATHER BRENDAN
Well, so am I. Congratulations.

MARK

When this is all over, I'm going to write an article about it. After all, sex sells. Seriously.

FATHER BRENDAN

So you're really doing this for the money.

MARK

Absolutely.

FATHER BRENDAN

Well, that makes me feel much better about the whole thing. Can I ask what she's like? Cheryl. You've never really said anything about her.

MARK

She's the most wonderful person on the planet. I'm glad we finally had intercourse, because now I realize that everything I do with her feels just great.

104 EXT. CHERYL'S PLACE. NIGHT 104

As usual, Cheryl's car is out front.

105 OMITTED 105

106 INT. BEDROOM. NIGHT 106

Cheryl crawls into bed beside Josh. She lies there with her eyes wide open, unable to sleep, her mind full of thoughts. Although she has not yet noticed, Josh is also awake.

JOSH

What's on your mind?

CHERYL

Oh, nothing.

JOSH

Don't believe you.

CHERYL

Okay, I've been thinking about the whole conversion thing.

JOSH

Still don't believe you.

CHERYL

Then, whatever it is, I guess I'm not in the mood for talking.

JOSH

What sort of mood are you in?

CHERYL

Another sort of mood.

They get into the business.

107 INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY 107

Mark is also awake, staring at nothing, his mind full of thoughts. As a distraction, he eventually turns and looks at the picture of the Virgin Mary.

MARK

So, what do you think?

108 INT. CHERYL'S PLACE. DAY 108

The phone rings. We hear footsteps approaching. Cheryl answers it.

CHERYL

Hullo, this is Cheryl.

She smiles.

CHERYL (CONT'D)

Mark?

109 INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY 109

Mark is in his iron lung.

MARK

Can we meet somewhere for a coffee?
Somewhere nice. My treat.

110 INT. CHERYL'S PLACE. DAY 110

CHERYL

I don't normally meet with clients outside of working hours, you know that.

111 INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY 111

MARK

How could you possibly describe
anything to do with me as normal?

112 INT. CHERYL'S PLACE. DAY 112

MARK (V.O.)

We don't have to talk about
business.

Cheryl smiles.

113 EXT. CAFE. DAY

113

A WAITER approaches Cheryl and Mark with two beautifully made cups of coffee. One of them has a straw accompanying it. He sets them down. Mark looks up at the waiter.

MARK

Could you put my cup right on the edge of the table there, and stick the straw in my mouth, please?

WAITER

Sure.

The waiter does exactly as asked.

WAITER (CONT'D)

Is that okay?

MARK

Perfect.

WAITER

Sir, I'd wait a couple of minutes. That coffee is pretty hot.

MARK

Thanks.

WAITER

You're welcome.

The waiter leaves. Mark and Cheryl look at each other.

CHERYL

So, what shall we talk about?

MARK

We don't have to do much talking.

Cheryl smiles at him. She is looking gorgeous today.

CHERYL

Then why are we here?

MARK

I just want to be seen with you in public. I find that as sexy as anything we've done so far.

He sips on his coffee and soaks her in with his eyes.

CHERYL

I'm glad you enjoy looking, after all.

MARK

I want people to say "Who's the guy with the blonde? How did he get so lucky?"

CHERYL

Or so rich.

MARK

Okay, if some old girlfriend from school you hadn't seen for years turned up suddenly, like right now, how would you introduce me? As your boyfriend?

CHERYL

No, as my husband. Why not go all the way.

MARK

Really?

CHERYL

Does that shock you?

MARK

Yes.

CHERYL

Then I guess it would shock her as well.

MARK

Who?

CHERYL

My old school friend that's going to come along any moment.

MARK

You really can picture me as husband material?

CHERYL

As long as we're pretending, sure.

MARK

Would you write down your address for me, please?

113A OMITTED

113A

114 EXT. CHERYL'S PLACE. DAY 114

Josh walks unhurriedly to the letter box at the front gate and collects the mail. As he flips through the envelopes, he stops at one which is addressed to Cheryl, sniffs it, then opens it. It contains a sheet of paper on which is typed what seems to be a poem. He reads it with interest, which develops into mild shock.

115 INT. CHERYL'S PLACE. DAY 115

Cheryl and Josh are in the kitchen, arguing.

JOSH

You said yourself, it's not supposed to get personal.

CHERYL

That's another thing altogether. What I want to know is where do you get off opening my mail?

JOSH

It was scented. I assumed it was just junk mail.

CHERYL

Even less reason to open it. Where is it? Give it to me.

JOSH

You're not getting it.

CHERYL

This is absolutely none of your fucking business.

JOSH

You're still not getting it. I threw it out.

CHERYL

You didn't.

JOSH

I fucking did.

Tony arrives home from school. As he comes in, his parents fall silent. He realizes he has walked in on an argument. He looks at both of them.

TONY

What's up?

A LITTLE LATER. The three of them are sitting round the dining table eating dinner in total silence. The hostility between Cheryl and Josh is palpable. When Josh finally does speak, he addresses Tony.

JOSH

Would you please ask your mother to pass the salt?

TONY

Cheryl, would you please pass the salt?

Cheryl glares at Tony and goes on with her meal.

116

INT. CHERYL'S PLACE. NIGHT

116

Cheryl is at the dining table, with her recorder and file in front of her, plus a late-night snack.

CHERYL

Mark appears to be indulging in typical transference behaviour. This is not unusual after first successful intercourse, but I think he is especially susceptible. He cannot help seeing me as the multi-functional, all-purpose woman, mother, sister, schoolmistress, whore, lover and best friend. At the same time, his anxiety about sexual performance has diminished.

117

INT. BEDROOM. NIGHT

117

Josh crawls into bed with Cheryl. She is still awake. He snuggles up to her.

JOSH

I'm sorry. I really upset you before.

CHERYL

No, you didn't. I'm fine.

JOSH

You sure?

CHERYL

Yes, I promise.

JOSH

Really?

CHERYL

Yes, I've come around to your point of view. You were right. You're generally right about these things.

JOSH

It was quite a nice poem. I mean, nothing astounding, but heartfelt, at least.

CHERYL

Josh, I need to go to sleep. Everything's good.

JOSH

Okay. Good night.

They kiss.

118 INT. CHERYL'S PLACE. NIGHT 118

Cheryl rummages around in the kitchen garbage. She finds nothing. She storms off to the laundry, flings open a cupboard, pokes around and comes up with a flashlight.

119 EXT. CHERYL'S BACK YARD. NIGHT 119

Cheryl makes her way to the end of the yard. Holding the flashlight between her teeth, she rummages around in the outdoor trash bin. Finally, she finds what she is looking for. An envelope. She takes the poem out of the envelope and reads it.

CHERYL

Let me touch you with my words.
For my hands lie limp as empty
gloves.

She goes over to the back steps, sits down and continues reading.

She puts it back in the envelope and walks back inside the house. She is visibly affected.

120 OMITTED 120

121 OMITTED 121

122 EXT. STREET OUTSIDE MARK'S PLACE. DAY 122

From behind, we see Vera wheeling Mark in his gurney. ANOTHER FEMALE FIGURE creeps up beside Vera and whispers in her ear, all unbeknownst to Mark. The other female figure takes over from Vera, who trails along, a few feet behind. Mark remains unaware. He has a new and different-looking shirt, even more out there than the previous one?

MARK

Do you think she'll like the shirt?

AMANDA

I like it. Does that count?

Mark can barely believe it.

MARK

Amanda?

123 EXT. PARK. DAY 123

They are stopped at a park bench. Vera is hovering in the background, out of earshot.

MARK

It's been a while.

AMANDA

I know. I'm sorry. I'm going to Germany. I wanted to say goodbye to you before I left.

MARK

Why are you going to Germany?

AMANDA

To study German.

MARK

For how long?

AMANDA

One or two years maybe. But we should keep in touch.

MARK

But why go to Germany? It's the only place in the world where humor is actually forbidden.

She laughs, then smiles quietly, then touches him.

AMANDA

You could always make me laugh. I love you, Mark. I really do.

Mark's face is a picture of anguish and confusion.

MARK

Really?

124 INT. SIDE CHAPEL. DAY

124

MARK

Yes, I love you, but not in that way. I love you, but I'm not in love with you. Blah, blah, blah. You know how it goes.

Mark lets out a deep, meaningful sigh. For a time, he and Father Brendan maintain a respectful silence.

125 EXT. PARK. DAY

125

AMANDA

I think it's great what you're doing with this surrogate lady.

She leans over and kisses Mark on the lips.

MARK

It could have been you.

AMANDA

It could have been, but it wasn't.

126 INT. SIDE CHAPEL. DAY

126

MARK

I had this faint hope that she would show the merest hint of jealousy. It shows you how naïve I am.

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

The fact that I was no longer a virgin, that I was a 'made man', so to speak, made no difference to her at all.

127 EXT. MOTEL. DAY 127

Cheryl's car is in the parking lot. We see her draw the blinds.

128 INT. MOTEL RECEPTION. DAY 128

Clerk takes two beers from a mini-bar and hands one to Vera.

VERA

Thanks.

CLERK

You want to go out some time?

VERA

No, I don't think so.

CLERK

What, your boyfriend?

VERA

No.

CLERK

Your parents?

VERA

No, I'm busy, that's all. What's wrong with this, anyway? We're having a nice time, aren't we?

CLERK

It's okay.

VERA

Or do you have things to do? I can go for a walk if you're busy and come back later.

CLERK

No, no, stay. Is this going to be a regular thing?

VERA

What?

CLERK

The therapy.

VERA

I don't know. I'm not the therapist.

CLERK

What sort of a therapist is she, really?

VERA

I told you the first time, she's a sex therapist.

The clerk looks at her closely. She appears to have a completely straight face.

VERA (CONT'D)

Today they're working on simultaneous orgasm.

CLERK

What's that?

129 INT. MOTEL ROOM. DAY

129

Mark and Cheryl are in bed, their faces close.

MARK

Boy, am I glad to see you.

CHERYL

Don't you say that to all the girls?

MARK

Yes, but I always mean it.

They kiss. Then Cheryl's head slides down and disappears from view.

CHERYL (V.O.)

Remember about the breathing. Concentrate on breathing out rather than in. Think of anything neutral. Sky, water, trees, ships, music, nothing too dramatic.

Mark closes his eyes.

130 INT. SIDE CHAPEL. DAY

130

MARK

The first time, I really didn't know what was going on. Technically it all happened, but nothing really happened in my head.

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

This time it did, and my head has never experienced anything like it before. Of course, I ignored Cheryl's advice about having neutral thoughts.

131 INT. SOMEWHERE. NIGHT 131

Amanda is giving Mark a pole dancing demonstration, complete with disco beat and mirror-ball lighting.

132 OMITTED 132

133 INT. MOTEL ROOM. DAY 133

Mark opens his eyes and looks up at Cheryl. She seems divine. His excitement increases. We hear the change in his breathing. Also in her breathing.

134 INT. SIDE CHAPEL. DAY 134

The expression of elation on Mark's face morphs dramatically into something else.

MARK

Then afterwards, there was this moment, this glimpse of an awful sadness to come.

Father Brendan closes his eyes and nods knowingly.

135 OMITTED 135

136 OMITTED 136

137 EXT. CHERYL'S PLACE. NIGHT

137

The Volvo is parked out front. The envelope is still on the dash.

138 INT. CHERYL'S PLACE. NIGHT 138

Cheryl is dictating.

CHERYL

Mark achieved an erection as soon as I started to suck on him. He did the controlled breathing, as I had suggested, and I was able to get on top and guide him in quite easily.

139 INT. MOTEL ROOM. DAY 139

We see Mark's face from Cheryl's POV. His eyes are still closed.

MARK

Is it in? Is it really in?

CHERYL

Yes, it's really in.

We hear Mark's thoughts.

MARK (V.O.)

I couldn't believe it.

We hear the sound of typing.

140 INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY 140

Mark is in his iron lung, typing. At the top of the page, we can see the title of the piece:

"On Seeing a Sex Surrogate" Page 8.

MARK (V.O.)

I was finally there. Too soon, I came. But she kept holding me inside her. Then a look of pleasure brushed lightly over her face...

141 INT. MOTEL ROOM. DAY 141

We see Cheryl's face from Mark's POV. It is as beatific as we have ever seen it.

MARK (V.O.)

... as though an all-day itch were finally being scratched. Letting me go, she put her hands down on the bed by my shoulders and kissed my chest. This act of affection moved me deeply.

Cheryl's actions follow Mark's description.

142 INT. SIDE CHAPEL. DAY 142

Mark is with Father Brendan.

MARK

I almost wept. No-one had ever
kissed me there before. It was so
unexpected and so natural.

143 INT. MOTEL ROOM. DAY 143

Cheryl's lips move away from Mark's chest. She kisses him on
the lips, light and lingering. As soon as there is enough
space between them, he whispers to her.

MARK

I love you.

She whispers back.

CHERYL

I love you, too.

MARK

Did you come?

CHERYL

Yes.

144 INT. CHERYL'S PLACE. NIGHT 144

Cheryl continues dictating.

CHERYL

Mark is breathing well and learning
to pace himself. There is no real
physical impediment to a variety of
sexual activities, given the right
sort of partner. His deeper
emotional needs are outside the
scope of my potential involvement.

Cheryl pauses, then goes on.

CHERYL (CONT'D)

As anticipated, this was the final
session.

Tony appears. He seems to have some understanding of what is
going on. He and Cheryl hug.

145 INT. MOTEL ROOM. DAY 145

They are still in the same intimate position.

MARK

What happens when...

CHERYL

What happens when what?

MARK

When people become attached to each other.

CHERYL

What people?

MARK

Just people. What's the chemistry of it all? When people are attracted to each other.

CHERYL

Are you attracted to me?

MARK

We're just talking hypothetically.

CHERYL

Hypothetically, they write poems, they have sex.

MARK

And what happens next?

CHERYL

After poetry and sex? Nothing or everything. The rest is by negotiation, as it were.

MARK

What do you mean?

CHERYL

I mean, you can just leave it at love and attraction, or you can make things complicated. As most people do.

MARK

Have you?

CHERYL

Oh, yes.

146 INT. MOTEL RECEPTION. DAY

146

The clerk looks bored. Vera looks at the time. She seems a little anxious.

VERA

Can I use that phone to call the room?

CLERK

Sure.

147 OMITTED 147
148 OMITTED 148
149 INT. MOTEL ROOM. DAY 149

The phone rings, Cheryl picks it up.

LATER

Cheryl, already dressed, is getting Mark dressed. She does up every button of his shirt lovingly.

CHERYL

What shall we do next time? Any requests?

Mark doesn't answer.

CHERYL (CONT'D)

Mark?

MARK

I'm thinking.

She finishes buttoning him up in silence. A strange feeling, a kind of chill that Cheryl senses, pervades the atmosphere.

MARK (CONT'D)

We have two sessions left, is that correct?

CHERYL

That's right. Or...

MARK

Or, what?

CHERYL

Or, we could stop now.

MARK

You mean, make this the last session?

CHERYL

Yes.

There is a pregnant pause.

MARK

What do you think we should do?

CHERYL

It's not we, it's you, Mark. It's up to you.

MARK

I want to know how you feel.

CHERYL

That doesn't come in to it.

MARK

Yes, it does. I don't just write poems to anyone.

CHERYL

Mark, what do you want me to say? How much I was touched by that? How special this has been to me? Is that going to help you? No, it's going to make things worse.

MARK

You mean to say, come the sixth session that will be it?

CHERYL

Yes, that will be it. I explained that the first time we met.

Mark has a serious and painful moment.

CHERYL (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. If it's any consolation, it's also hard for me to think about it.

MARK

Then maybe we should pull the plug now.

CHERYL

I think maybe we should. It's only going to get harder. I guess you might as well save the money. Maybe buy yourself a nice futon.

A LITTLE LATER.

Cheryl is getting dressed. Mark watches pensively. She pauses and looks at him. He keeps a brave face. There is a knock on the door.

CHERYL (CONT'D)
Just a moment.

She and Mark make eye contact for the last time. They manage to smile at each other.

MARK (V.O.)
I desperately wanted to feel that
because of Cheryl, my life had
changed. But it hadn't.

Apart from her usual things, she is also carrying a long mirror.

CHERYL
Bye, Mark

MARK (V.O.)
Bye.

As Cheryl goes out, Vera comes in.

VERA
Everything all right?

CHERYL
He did great. See you. I'm sorry,
I have to run.

VERA
See you.

Vera walks in and closes the door behind her.

150

EXT. MOTEL ROOM. DAY

150

Cheryl goes to her car and opens the trunk. As she is putting the mirror inside, the Chinese clerk, who is showing a COUPLE to their room, gives her an odd look. Cheryl takes no notice, gets in her car and starts the engine.

Just then, Vera runs up and taps on her window. The window winds down. Vera hands Cheryl an envelope with money in it. At first, Cheryl just looks at it, then realizes what it is.

VERA
You forgot this.

Cheryl smiles.

CHERYL

I knew there was a reason I came
here today.

Vera waves goodbye as she goes and Cheryl sits contemplating the envelope in her lap. Then she tosses it onto the dash and drives away.

151 EXT. STREET OUTSIDE MARK'S PLACE. DAY 151

Vera wheels Mark home. They travel in silence.

152 INT. SIDE CHAPEL. DAY 152

Father Brendan and Mark are together in the chapel.

MARK

I felt I'd just been through a ceremony that I didn't know the meaning of. I kept thinking, is that all there is? Just an empty hole at the end of it? A bigger hole than there was before?

FATHER BRENDAN

I'm sorry Mark, you can't always trust your feelings. You've achieved a great thing. It may take you a while to realize that.

Time passes.

153 INT. MARK'S PLACE. NIGHT 153

It is a moonlit night. On the opposite wall from the Virgin Mary is a picture of Amanda and Mark. Mark lies in his iron lung staring at it.

MARK (V.O.)

I wrote letters to Amanda in
Germany.
Five, six pages long
A year passed,
Heard nothing.
Was it my fault?
Of course it was.
But the guilt isn't enough to patch
over the rage.
I pound the insides of my mind with
words, such puny fists,
And nobody hears.

The poem ends and we hear instead a RADIO BROADCAST of a Giants' game. Mark is engrossed. Suddenly the broadcast stops. The digital read-out on the clock radio, which says 12:57, disappears. A street light, visible through the window, goes out. The electric pump under Mark's iron lung whirrs to a halt. We hear the sound of air escaping, then an eerie silence. Even the cat is motionless.

For a few moments, Mark seems hypnotized. Then, he twists his head and clamps onto his mouth stick. He manoeuvres it over to the speaker button on the phone and manages to press it in the semi-darkness. We hear a dial tone.

154 INT. ROD'S BEDROOM. NIGHT 154

There is an answering machine on a bedside table.

ROD'S VOICE

Hi, this is Rod. Leave a message,
or not.

MARK (V.O.)

Rod, it's Mark. I need help. The power's gone out, including the pump on the iron lung. I'd say I've got about three hours before I start to turn blue. I hope you get this in time.

155 INT. MARK'S PLACE. NIGHT 155

Mark winces in frustration.

MARK

Okay... nine-one-one.

He swings the mouth stick over to the 9 button. As he presses it, he loses his grip and the mouth stick falls to the floor.

MARK (CONT'D)

Shit!

At first, he seems panicky, but after a few moments he begins to control his breathing and gradually psyches himself into a strange calm.

MARK (CONT'D)

So this is how it ends.

Time passes. We see Mark from a high angle. More time passes. We see Mark's face as he slips into unconsciousness.

156

INT. MIKVAH (JEWISH RITUAL BATH-HOUSE). DAY

156

Cheryl enters the room wrapped in a white, terry cloth robe. The room is dominated by a small, beautifully tiled immersion pool with a hand rail and steps. The MIKVAH LADY gets up from her chair and approaches her.

MIKVAH LADY
Is this your first time?

CHERYL
Yes, it is. I'm converting.

She takes off her robe and hands it to the Mikvah Lady, who does not fail to notice Cheryl's body.

MIKVAH LADY
So, what do you do?

Cheryl closes her eyes and thinks for a moment.

CHERYL
I don't think you'd understand.

MIKVAH LADY
You can try me.

CHERYL
Okay. I'm a housewife.

MIKVAH LADY
Why shouldn't I understand?

CHERYL
I guess I was mistaken.

Cheryl steps towards the pool.

MIKVAH LADY
I see you're very comfortable with being naked.

She takes hold of the rail and puts her foot in the water.

CHERYL
That has never been one of my problems.

MIKVAH LADY
Sometimes new brides come with their mothers. Do I have to take this off? Can I please leave this on? They've never been naked before. No honey, it all has to come off.

CHERYL

And it does?

Cheryl takes another step into the water.

MIKVAH LADY

And it does. They stand on the edge of that pool without anything to cling to but themselves. Nothing to hide behind. This is your body. This is the body that God crafted for you.

Cheryl immerses herself up to her chest.

MIKVAH LADY (CONT'D)

Immerse completely. Go completely under the water, without touching the walls or anything.

She immerses completely. We see her under the water. She hears a voice in the distance, her own voice. At the same time, there is a look of elation in her eyes.

CHERYL (V.O.)

Okay Mark, you can open your eyes now.

157 INT. MOTEL ROOM. DAY

157

Mark is on the bed alone. He opens his eyes.

CHERYL (V.O.)

This is your body.

A few feet in front of Mark, Cheryl is holding a full-length mirror. The angle is such that he can see all of himself. He is mesmerized by his own image. Flashes of light from the mirror flicker over his face.

MARK (V.O.)

So this is the body that someone was able to love. Not quite as bad as I thought.

158 INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR. DAY

158

Overhead fluorescent lights flash by, as we observe the ceiling from Mark's point of view. We also hear the sound of rapidly rolling rubber wheels, and a voice.

VOICE

Mark, can you hear me? Open your eyes.

159 INT. HOSPITAL. DAY

159

Mark is in a regular hospital bed, with a temporary plastic cocoon over him in place of his iron lung. There is a volunteer called SUSAN in the room with him.

SUSAN

They'll be letting you go today. Whoever looks after you will leave the portable respirator switched on at night, fully charged, so you'll have at least one back-up system.

MARK

How close was I?

SUSAN

To what?

MARK

You know, to that tunnel thing and the light, and the voice saying don't go near the light.

SUSAN

Is that what you remember?

MARK

No. I assume I passed out. Before that, I remember feeling sorry for myself.

SUSAN

Do you feel relieved now?

MARK

No. I mean, I'm relieved that Rod got to me in time, but I still feel sorry for myself.

SUSAN

I'm sure there's a cure for that. Would you like to talk to someone?

MARK

I feel comfortable talking to you.

SUSAN

I'm only a volunteer, not a therapist. I can refer you to someone if you like.

Mark breaks into a broad smile, then a chuckle.

MARK

I'm sorry, I don't mean to be rude.
I'm just smiling at the idea that a
therapist could do anything useful
for me right now. My priest
couldn't.

SUSAN

Are you religious?

MARK

Yes. I would find it absolutely
intolerable not to be able to blame
someone for all this. Are you?

SUSAN

No, I don't go to any church and I
don't think about God very much.
But I believe there's a mysterious
logic, or poetry to life. I guess
that makes me a spiritual type.

MARK

Yes, that would count.

SUSAN

Would you like me to visit you?

MARK

Are you married?

SUSAN

No.

MARK

Do you have a steady boyfriend?

SUSAN

No.

MARK

Then please visit as often as you
can.

160 EXT. HOSPITAL. DAY

160

She smiles. Mark is loaded into an ambulance.

SUSAN

Bye. Take care.

MARK

There's just one more thing I want
to tell you.

She gets into the ambulance and squats down next to him.

MARK (CONT'D)
I'm not a virgin.

She looks genuinely pleased to hear it.

SUSAN
So, are you in a relationship at
the moment?

MARK
No, it was a passing thing.

The driver is ready to shut the doors.

SUSAN
Thanks for sharing that with me.

She gets out of the ambulance and waves.

161 INT. AMBULANCE. DAY 161

Mark is accompanied by an AMBULANCE OFFICER. We see clear blue sky through the back windows. The sun shines in and warms Mark's face. He closes his eyes in contentment.

AMBULANCE OFFICER
Nice day, isn't it?

MARK
The best.

AMBULANCE OFFICER
Good to be alive, huh?

162 EXT. HOSPITAL. DAY 162

We see the disappearing figure of Susan from the point of view of the departing ambulance.

MARK (V.O.)
I met Susan five years before I
died. She was the love of my life.
We had the same priorities,
baseball pretty much came first,
and we wrote each other mushy
poems. I never expected it, nor did
she, but that's often the way
things turn out.

163 INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY 163

Rod shows Father Brendan into Mark's room.

Father Brendan sits in a chair next to Mark's iron lung.

FATHER BRENDAN

That was quite something. What do you propose to do for an encore?

MARK

Yep, I almost found out the big secret. But here I am, back with the living. If there is another place, then I think they took one look at me and decided to throw me back.

FATHER BRENDAN

And welcome back.

MARK

And thank you for coming to visit.

FATHER BRENDAN

I know it's been awhile since we talked about this... About Cheryl. At the time, you seemed to feel so badly about her... or about it?

MARK

I no longer feel like that.

Father Brendan is rather taken by surprise.

FATHER BRENDAN

Oh? That's good to hear. In the end, you're glad that you did it?

MARK

Yes, I am. In fact, at this point in time, I feel very blessed.

FATHER BRENDAN

Blessed?

MARK

Yes, blessed. They put me on this new anti-depressant and now I can really see life from the cup half full rather than cup half empty point of view.

Father Brendan looks truly amazed.

MARK (CONT'D)

It takes about six weeks to kick in, but when it does, you can really tell the difference.

FATHER BRENDAN

Hey, that's great.

Mark grins.

MARK

I'm pulling your leg, Father. I'm not on drugs. I have a girlfriend.

FATHER BRENDAN

You're kidding me. A real girlfriend?

MARK

A very real girlfriend. She adores me. She'll do anything for me. And I can get pretty kinky sometimes, believe you me. Her name is Susan.

FATHER BRENDAN

I'm flabbergasted. Is she pretty?

MARK

She sure is.

FATHER BRENDAN

Has she got a sister?

MARK

As a matter of fact...

FATHER BRENDAN

I'm kidding.

MARK

No, you're not. Anyway, we're starting a publishing company together.

Father Brendan smiles and shakes his head.

FATHER BRENDAN

Here I was, all prepared to offer comfort to the forlorn - that's supposed to be my specialty - and now I can just throw away that little speech.

MARK

No, no. Please make the little speech. I'd love to hear it.

FATHER BRENDAN

Okay, but I'll try and keep it short.

MARK

Don't make it too short.

FATHER BRENDAN

Okay, fine. Here goes. The meaning of love. Love is a journey.

MARK

I already like it.

There is a pause.

FATHER BRENDAN

That's it. That's all of I've got.
I told you it's short. Love is a
journey.

Mark laughs.

163A OMITTED 163A

164 EXT. MARK'S PLACE. NIGHT 164

Father Brendan lets himself out and walks back the way he came. There is definitely a smile on his face.

165 INT. MARK'S PLACE. NIGHT 165

Mark also has a smile on his face as he lies awake.

MARK (V.O.)

Actually, I was on drugs, I was taking anti-depressants and they were helping a bit. At least I was able to see the cup-of-life metaphor as a useful tool. Of course, the two halves were never even. Not in my case, that's for sure. Look at all the years of unendurable crap I've had to put up with. That fills most of the cup. But in the little bit that's left, what do I have to show for myself? Journalism? Poetry? At the very least, three beautiful women who all loved me and will all show up at my funeral.

166 EXT. CHERYL'S PLACE. DAY 166

Josh saunters out to the mail box. He retrieves the mail, sifts through it and pauses over a letter. He is tempted to open it, but thinks better of it.

167 EXT. CHERYL'S BACKYARD. DAY 167

Cheryl is planting stuff in the back yard. Josh approaches her with the letter.

JOSH

It's from a Susan Fernbach.

She takes it and opens it uncertainly, somehow anticipating its contents.

168

EXT. CHURCH. DAY

168

A full-blown Catholic funeral is happening. Meaningful hugs are exchanged. Eyes are dabbed. We hear Mark's voice.

MARK (V.O.)

Three Reasons to Live

The mundane:

O God, it was boring, but I did it
got it out of the way

The transcendent:

We had this agreement --
God gave me life for a while
I gave Him gratitude for a while
and it worked out OK

The curious:

You know how every day is
different?
I just wanted to see
what would happen next

169

INT. CHURCH. DAY

169

Father Brendan delivers a eulogy. We see members of Mark's FAMILY, all teary-eyed.

FATHER BRENDAN (TO MARK)

Mark, I know you're watching. I'm
sorry, my friend, but we have to do
this. Just bear with me, and I
think you might like it.

FATHER BRENDAN (TO THE CONGREGATION)

(CONT'D)

I've been branching out lately,
reading Native American stories
about the character of the
trickster. Sometimes he shows up
as a coyote, sometimes as a raven,
but he always does the unexpected.
The trickster breaks the rules.
Mark O'Brien, whose life we're
celebrating today, was very much
the trickster -- anyone who knew
him knew that.

(MORE)

FATHER BRENDAN (TO THE CONGREGATION)

Besides his irreverent humor and alarming honesty, he always did the unexpected.

In nearly every aspect of his life, Mark did the unexpected. His was a dynamic voice in a paralyzed body, a full life lived long after he should have been dead. He graduated from college, wrote and published articles and poems, and -- against all odds, by his own admission -- entered into the fully human experience of physical love.

In this way, Mark lived from day to day to day, from breath to breath to breath, for 49 years. He loved, and he was loved and in his quiet voice, he spoke loud truths.

We see Rod, Vera and Laura the therapist in various rows. Also Amanda, holding a toddler in her arms and sitting next to a tall, boring-looking HUSBAND.

FATHER BRENDAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Susan Fernbach will now read one of
Mark's favorite poems.

SUSAN (V.O.)
This is called Love Poem for No One
in Particular.

We see SUSAN at the lectern, reading from a book.

SUSAN
Let me touch you with my words.
For my hands lie limp as empty
gloves.
Let my words stroke your hair,
Slide down your back and tickle
your belly.
For my hands, light and free-flying
as bricks,
Ignore my wishes and stubbornly
refuse to carry out my quietest
desires.

We see Cheryl, as deeply touched by the words as she was the first time.

SUSAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Let my words enter your mind,
bearing torches.
Admit them willingly into your
being
So they may caress you gently
within.

170 INT. MARK'S PLACE. NIGHT

170

In the middle of the room, moonlit, is Mark's iron lung, empty and majestic, with the cat sitting on top. As we move around the eerie capsule, we hear the sound of the French Can-Can slowly fade up. It continues over END CREDITS.