

**THE SESSIONS**

(formerly The Surrogate)

Written by

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Based On A True Story

**EXT. BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA. DAY**

1

1

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.

**1A.**

**NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)**

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

**2.**

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"**

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE MARK'S. NIGHT

2

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.

INT. MARK'S PLACE. NIGHT

3

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.

2A.

**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.

3.

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.

**EXT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY**

4

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.

**INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY**

5

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.

4.

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.

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

6

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?

**4A.**

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.

**5.**

**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.

**INT. CATHOLIC CHURCH. DAY**

**7**

**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**

**5A.**

**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.

**6.**

**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.

7.

**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?

8.

**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.

**INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY**

8  
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"

**EXT. BERKELEY COLLEGE. DAY**

9  
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

**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.

11

9.

**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.

**INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY**

12

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.**

**12A**

**DAY**

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.

**EXT. PARK. DAY**

14

14

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

9A.

**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.

10.

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.

**INT. BATHROOM. NIGHT**

13

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.

**INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY**

15

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.

11.

**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.

**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.

**16**

**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  
**INT. SIDE CHAPEL. DAY**

18 Mark and Father Brendan are huddled together in the little chapel. 18

**FATHER BRENDAN**

Did she reciprocate your feelings?

**MARK**

She didn't seem to.

11A.

**FATHER BRENDAN**

Sometimes people can be very shy about their emotions.

12.

**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.

**EXT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY**

19

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.

13.

**ROD**

I'm Rod. I do four to twelve.

**INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY**

20

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.

14.

**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.

**14A.**

**CARMEN (CONT'D)**

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

**(MORE)**

**15.**

**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.

16.

**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.

17.

**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

**OMITTED**

28 28

**EXT. BUILDING. DAY**

29 29

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

**INT. LOBBY. DAY**

30 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.

**17A.**

**MARK**

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

The Latino guy takes no notice. Vera is flushed and angry.  
**18.**

**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.

**INT. LAURA'S OFFICE. DAY**

**31**

**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.

19.

**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?

20.

**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.

**31A OMITTED**

**21.**

**31A**

**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?

**22.**

**INT. CHURCH. DAY**

32

Rod wheels Mark into the church.

32

**INT. SIDE CHAPEL. DAY**

33

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

33

**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)**

23.

**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.

23A.

**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)**

24.

**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

25.

36 OMITTED 36

37 OMITTED 37

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

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.

26.

**INT. CARMEN'S PLACE. DAY**

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.

**EXT. STREET NEAR CARMEN'S. DAY**

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

27.

43 OMITTED 43

**EXT. STREET. DAY**

44 44

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

**INT. CHERYL'S KITCHEN. DAY**

45 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'.

28.

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.

**INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY**

46

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?

29.

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.

**INT. CHERYL'S KITCHEN. DAY**

47

47

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

29A.

**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.

**INT. MARK'S PLACE. NIGHT**

48

48

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

30.

**MARK**

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

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

49

49

Vera lets herself in.

**INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY**

50

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**



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.

32.

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.

**33.**

**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.

**34.**

**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.

**34A.**

**CHERYL**

How do you feel right now?

35.

**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.

**36.**

**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!

**36A.**

**54**      **INT.    BATHROOM.    DAY**

**54**

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

**37.**

**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.

**37A.**

**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.

**37B.**

**MARK (CONT'D)**

Are these the body awareness exercises?

**38.**

**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

**INT. CARMEN'S PLACE. DAY**

59 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.

39.

**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.

**EXT. STREET NEAR CARMEN'S. DAY**

60

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.

40.

**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?

**41.**

**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.

**EXT. CHERYL'S PLACE. NIGHT**

**61**

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

**61**

**INT. CHERYL'S PLACE. NIGHT**

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.

**INT. CHERYL'S BEDROOM. NIGHT**

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?

42.

**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.

**INT. SIDE CHAPEL. DAY**

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.

**INT. MARK'S PLACE. NIGHT**

65

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!

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

66

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?

43.

**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

INT. CARMEN'S PLACE. DAY

68

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...

43A.

**MARK**

Oh God! Oh God!

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

44.

**MARK (CONT'D)**

Damn! Shit!

**INT. SIDE CHAPEL. DAY**

69

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

**INT. CARMEN'S PLACE. DAY**

72

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?  
45.

**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!

**INT. BATHROOM. DAY**

73

Cheryl steps out of the shower.

73

**INT. CARMEN'S PLACE. DAY**

Cheryl gets into bed.

**MARK**

I'm really sorry.

46.

**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.

**EXT. CHERYL'S PLACE. NIGHT**

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

**INT. CHERYL'S PLACE. NIGHT**

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.

**INT. LAURA'S OFFICE. DAY**

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)**

47.

**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.

**INT. SIDE CHAPEL. DAY**

78

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.

**EXT. CLOTHING STORE. DAY**

79

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

**INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY**

81

81

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

**VERA**

You nervous?

**MARK**

Only a little.

48.

**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

**EXT. CARMEN'S DRIVEWAY. DAY**

83

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.

49.

**INT. CARMEN'S PLACE. DAY**

84

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.

**EXT. CARMEN'S PLACE. DAY**

85

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.

**INT. MOTEL RECEPTION. DAY**

86

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)**

50.

**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?

**EXT. MOTEL. DAY**

87

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.

**INT. MOTEL ROOM. DAY**

88

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?

51.

**CHERYL**

You took the words right out of my mouth.

**INT. MOTEL RECEPTION. DAY**

89

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.

**INT. MOTEL ROOM. DAY**

90

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.

52.

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.

53.

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.

**EXT. BEACH. DAY**

91

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.

**INT. MOTEL ROOM. DAY**

92

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?

**53A.**

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

**54.**

**INT.   SIDE CHAPEL.   DAY**

**93**

Mark has a faraway look.

**93**

**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.

**55.**

**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?

**INT. MOTEL ROOM. DAY**

96

96

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

**CHERYL**

You awake?

56.

**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?

**56A.**

**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.

**57.**

**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.

58.

**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.

**INT. LAURA'S OFFICE. DAY**

97

Laura is on the phone to Cheryl.

97

**LAURA**

How's it going?

**INT. CHERYL'S PLACE. DAY**

98

Cheryl is at her desk.

98

**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.  
59.

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.

60.

**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.

<b>104</b>	<b>EXT. CHERYL'S PLACE. NIGHT</b>	<b>104</b>
	As usual, Cheryl's car is out front.	
<b>105</b>	<b>OMITTED</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>106</b>	<b>INT. BEDROOM. NIGHT</b>	<b>106</b>
	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.



that.

61A.

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.

62.

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.

**62A.**

**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?

**62B.**

**113A OMITTED**

**113A  
63.**

**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.

**64.**

**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.

**INT. CHERYL'S PLACE. NIGHT**

**116**

**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.

**INT. BEDROOM. NIGHT**

117

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?

**64A.**

**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.

**65.**



**EXT. PARK. DAY**

123

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.

67.

**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?

**INT. SIDE CHAPEL. DAY**

124

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.



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.

69.

**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**





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.

**74.**

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.

**INT. CHERYL'S PLACE. NIGHT**

**144**

**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.

**INT. MOTEL ROOM. DAY**

**145**

**145**

They are still in the same intimate position.

**75.**

**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.

76.

77.

**INT. MOTEL RECEPTION. DAY**

146

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  
INT. MOTEL ROOM. DAY  
149 149

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.

**EXT. MOTEL ROOM. DAY**

150

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.

81.

**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.

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

Vera wheels Mark home. They travel in silence.

**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.

**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.

82.

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.

**INT. ROD'S BEDROOM. NIGHT**

154

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.

**INT. MARK'S PLACE. NIGHT**

155

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.

**83.**

**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.

84.

**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.

**INT. MOTEL ROOM. DAY**

157

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.

85.

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.

**86.**

**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.

**EXT. HOSPITAL. DAY**

160

She smiles. Mark is loaded into an ambulance.

160

**SUSAN**

Bye. Take care.

**MARK**

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

87.

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.

**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.

161

**AMBULANCE OFFICER**

Nice day, isn't it?

**MARK**

The best.

**AMBULANCE OFFICER**

Good to be alive, huh?

**EXT. HOSPITAL. DAY**

162

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

162

**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.

**INT. MARK'S PLACE. DAY**

163

Rod shows Father Brendan into Mark's room.  
88.

163

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.

**89.**

**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.

**89A.**

**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.

**90.**

**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  
EXT. MARK'S PLACE. NIGHT  
164 164  
Father Brendan lets himself out and walks back the way he came. There is definitely a smile on his face.  
INT. MARK'S PLACE. NIGHT  
165 165  
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.

EXT. CHERYL'S PLACE. DAY  
166 166  
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.

EXT. CHERYL'S BACKYARD. DAY  
167 167  
Cheryl is planting stuff in the back yard. Josh approaches her with the letter.

JOSH

It's from a Susan Fernbach.  
90A.

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

EXT. CHURCH. DAY

168

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

**INT. CHURCH. DAY**

169

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)**

**90B.**

**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.

91.

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.

**INT. MARK'S PLACE. NIGHT**

170

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.