

# **Treading Water: An Exploration of Grief and Surviving Suicide**

by

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## **Declaration of Committee**

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## **Abstract**

*“Treading Water: An Exploration of Grief and Surviving Suicide”* is an original feature length screenplay called *“Treading Water”* that explores grief, specifically how a person survives the death of a loved one by suicide.

This screenplay examines a predominant narrative device in literature that uses suicide for the character and the author to end the story in a dramatic conclusion. This often leaves little or no time to explore the grief of those left behind.

The story in this screenplay deconstructs the conventions of a tragic suicide love story where the protagonist commits suicide over a broken heart; and instead begins the story with the survivor, broken-hearted, and grieving over their lover who has killed themselves by suicide.

Graduate Liberal Studies (GLS) influences on this screenplay are discussed in the preceding Statement of Intent.

**Keywords:** screenplay; suicide; grief.

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And finally, to my family, especially my sisters Karen and Shauna who were there for me when I went through grief the first time and during the last few years while I was writing about it. Family is everything.

Help is available - Canada Suicide Prevention 833-456-4566

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Karen McMahon; Sunset Sail; Salish Sea; September 2011.

## Statement of Intent

During the foundation year of my Master's degree, through the Graduate Liberal Studies (GLS) program, I was deeply affected by several texts: *Antigone* by Sophocles, *The Sorrow of Young Werther* by Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, and *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert.

All of these books end with suicides and while reading these stories and then listening to the class discussions I found myself getting increasingly upset... angry. The suicides depicted in these texts felt melodramatic and exploitive.

Our foundation year at GLS explored passion and reason, so once my passion settled-down, I explored my reason and decided that I needed some self-reflection and time to explore my own personal biases. With these GLS readings as catalysts I set out to discover why the depiction of suicide in these novels hit such a strong a nerve for me.

My initial impression was that the placement of these suicides felt like a *deus ex machina* without authentically exploring the depression leading to suicide or the grief of those left behind.

For my master's project I challenged myself to write a feature length screenplay that explored grief, specifically how people survived the loss of a loved one after this person ended their life by suicide, and to use this experiential experience to reflect on how suicide had been depicted in selected GLS texts.

What follows is my original premise that propelled my inquiry into suicide literature, my hasty assumptions, and the findings I made while writing my own screenplay about suicide. This will provide the rationale for my approach to writing a screenplay *Treading Water* for my master's project.

## Original Premise – Suicide Tropes

In these GLS texts, I first discovered that suicide was predominantly used as a narrative device to conclude a story. As Elizabeth Bronfen and Sarah Goodwin write, “...death marks the impossible limit of representation, while at the same time, death is an inevitability of representation”.<sup>1</sup> Suicide was a particularly potent narrative trope in this sense, as it acts as an exit strategy for both the character and the author to end the story in a dramatic conclusion. Suicide was often the dramatic climax in the final chapter of the text or act of the screenplay and the grief of those left behind was invariably ignored.

Furthermore, the portrayal of suicide was often melodramatic and not a true reflection of the human condition; either of those who died by suicide or of the survivors left behind to grieve. At the time, I felt that the portrayal of suicide in our GLS novels felt inauthentic.

Johanne Wolfgang von Goethe may have romanticized suicide in his novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* however over 50 years later in his autobiography *Truth and Poetry; From My Life* he further reflected that “...suicide is an event of human nature, which, whatever may be said and done in respect to it, demands the sympathy of every man, and in every epoch must be discussed anew.”<sup>2</sup>

My intention was that my screenplay would contribute to this evolving representation and discussion and that through my research I would explore how suicide had been represented in literature and feature films, where it has worked well, where common tropes have evolved and where the gaps were.

While writing my screenplay I wanted to challenge these tropes and in some small way contribute to a greater understanding of suicide and grief through storytelling. This turned out to be a lofty goal and one that hampered my writing.

I also hoped that writing a screenplay would be a dynamic way to inform my research. I suspected that I would struggle to write a scene, dive into research, and then return to my writing with renewed clarity.



This was not the case. Writing the screenplay required all of my attention. Occasionally, I'd scribble down some thoughts on my process, however I was not able to revisit these properly until after I had completed my screenplay.

Learning by doing is a pedagogy that I personally respond well to. My hope was that this experiential process would help me learn why writers fall into suicide tropes in order to adhere to an established dramatic structure and if it was possible to deconstruct this dominant discourse.

The process of writing a screenplay did influence my thinking on suicide literature but in unexpected ways.

In my original proposal to the Steering Committee I narrowly categorized suicide narratives into three common tropes that I've identified as romantic, heroic, and intellectual.

In helping to define my narrative categories, I also made myself aware of other categorizations for suicide by influential sociologists, psychiatrists, and psychoanalysts such as the French sociologist Emile Durkheim who in his study *Suicide* (based on his research of European suicide data) "established four categories of suicide: Egotistical, Fatalistic, Anomic, and Altruistic"<sup>3</sup> that overlap the tropes I've identified.

My emphasis on narrative meant that my central reference points were drawn from literary theory, literature, and specifically film. Screenwriting is my personal expertise and storytelling my life-long passion which my experiences in GLS has greatly contributed to.

Literature and film are a reflection of society and therefore continue to mirror not only the ever-evolving study of suicide but what Durkheim coined as the "collective consciousness" or what society has come to understand about suicide. However, I'd argue that what we know about suicide today, over 100 years after Durkheim's *Suicide*, is not satisfactorily being reflected in the pages of novels or on the screens of theatres. The depiction of suicide is still trapped in the tropes established long ago.

The first of these tropes I identified was the romantic trope; when suicide is represented as a tragic affirmation of love. The protagonist commits suicide in a melodramatic fashion at the

end of the story in a direct response to unrequited love or a tragic inability to be with their true love (Shakespeare, Goethe, Bronte, Flaubert, Tolstoy).

This has been an especially strong narrative device during the Renaissance and no one embraced it more than Shakespeare in his plays such as *Romeo & Juliette*, *Anthony and Cleopatra* or *Othello*.

This romantic trope peaked appropriately during the writing of the romantics in novels like Johanne Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* or Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and continued in the writing of realists like L.N. Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*.

Today many of these novels have been adapted into feature films, *Madame Bovary* over a dozen times, and yet I argued that this trope was increasingly difficult to pull off in a modern world where we suffer the loss of a multitude of relationships, divorces, and heartbreaks. In modern literature or films our protagonists may suffer a broken heart but rarely kill themselves over it.

A second trope I discovered was the heroic suicide where the protagonist dies a heroic and noble death. Again, this death is used for a heightened climax of the story however in this scenario the protagonist sacrifices themselves for another or would rather die than live with the collapse of their economic or political power which often defined their identity (Sophocles, Ibsen, Hugo, Dickens). In the case of women this was usually aligned with their reputations and their reputation was commensurate with their moral chastity (Dickens, Chopin).

I argued that from the ancient Greeks to present day Hollywood this heroic trope is still going strong. In Sophocles' *Antigone*, the protagonist Antigone hangs herself rather than be imprisoned in Creon's tomb and over a thousand years later in Ridley Scott's *Thelma and Louise* the women drive off a cliff rather than go to prison.

The third and more difficult trope to articulate I called the philosophical or intellectual suicide. Suicide is used as a metaphor to articulate a philosophical or intellectual commentary on the time, generally on morality, religion, or politics (Camus, Dostoyevsky, Chekov, Woolf).

Albert Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus* declared that, “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide.”<sup>4</sup> Many modern authors have echoed this opinion in their work exploring suicide from an intellectual perspective.

The philosophical suicide trope became more common with the realists and modernists writers. Fyodor Dostoyevsky used suicide to explore free will and morality in *Brothers Karamazov* and Anton Chekhov used suicide in *The Sea Gull* to dramatize unrequited love but also the tortured artist and existentialism.

Over 100 years later, this intellectual trope has continued in films like *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* where director Milos Forman examined free will, and in the dark existential film *Harold and Maude* (Hal Ashby, 1971) that explored the culture of meaning and death through suicide.

Also, films like *The Virgin Suicides* (Sophia Coppola, 1999) have worked as an intellectual metaphor for the angst and isolation of growing into adulthood but I argued was not a true reflection of mental health of adolescent girls.

The word suicide, from the Latin word *suicidium*, means “the killing of oneself” and the modernist writers’ exploration of self is evident in this intellectual trope.

The influence of these modern literary suicides had a profound effect on the field of Psychoanalysis, most significantly on Sigmund Freud.

If Durkheim’s work *Suicide* was the foundation for sociological categorization of suicide than Sigmund Freud’s writings, specifically *Mourning and Melancholia* have become the basis for psychoanalytic discussions of suicide. Where Durkheim looked at the social causes of suicide Freud began to dive into the psychological causes of depression.

“Psychoanalysis and literature have long found themselves in a dialogue of mutually enriching yet often quite unsympathetic criticisms...”<sup>5</sup> and modern psychoanalysis along with sociology and psychiatry has continued to influence how we depict suicide in literature and feature films.

Although I researched these overlaps in disciplines, I focused on these three narrative tropes using predominantly literary theory, literature, and film.

What I discovered quite quickly was that none of these three tropes, while they possess narrative merit, realistically represented the truth of why people die by suicide or how those left behind grieve. People do not kill themselves because they are broken-hearted, heroic, or making a philosophical point.

As grief counsellor Carol Staudacher writes, “It is vital to understand that suicide is not solely the result of some sudden, bizarre impulse; nor is it one single act which can be isolated and analyzed without examining the whole life context in which it occurred. The final life-taking act is part of a process. It has at its base long-standing conditions which arise in varying degrees from psychic, social and cultural forces.”<sup>6</sup>

There have been modern novels like Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar* that dove into the psychology of the character who died by suicide and briefly explored the shocked response to those around them, however few novels continued the story of those left behind.

Films like *The Big Chill* (Lawrence Kasdan, 1983) reunited eight Baby Boomers after the suicide of their friend but the film is remembered for their weekend shenanigans and an R&B soundtrack rather than an authentic portrayal of suicide or the grief that follows.

Other films such as *Ordinary People* (Robert Redford, 1980) have deftly explored grief however not specifically the grief of a suicide. The son Conrad (played by Timothy Hutton) fails at suicide and the narrative is extensively about his mother unable to accept the accidental drowning death of his brother.

Although I discovered many films with a suicide in the plot I struggled to find a screenplay that realistically depicted the complicated struggle of depression leading to suicide and specifically the long painful journey of grief for those left behind.

## **My Screenplay**

The initial intention of my screenplay was to explore the aftermath of suicide and to have my story not end in a suicide; but rather begin with one.

I wanted to deconstruct the conventions of a tragic suicide love story where the protagonist commits suicide over a broken-heart and instead begin the story with the survivor, broken-hearted, and grieving over their lover who has killed themselves by suicide. I was successful in implementing this structure. That was the easy part.

My intention was also to attempt to debunk any romantic notions of suicide. I wanted to expose the ugly, painful, unrelenting journey of those left behind. A story not often told in literature or feature films. I also wanted, in some small way, to try and lift the veil of shame around this subject.

I had hoped to draw on grief psychology. Not only did I personally see a suicide grief counsellor after the death of my partner, I joined a suicide survivor support group, and I read extensively on the subject of death, suicide, and grief.

I had planned to incorporate and yet deconstruct the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance into the three-act structure of a screenplay. These stages were coined by psychiatrist Elisabeth Kubler-Ross in her seminal book *On Death and Dying* (Kubler Ross) and are still used by many therapists despite Kubler-Ross herself admitted these stages were never meant to be a linear checklist to race through but merely an observation of what some people experience.

Grief is a complicated and mysterious human condition and grief over a suicide has its additional challenges of processing the shock, violence, unanswered questions, guilt and shame. “The grieving process for survivors of suicide is longer in duration than for survivors of death due to accidents, natural causes, or illness. In addition, the suicide survivor bears a deep anguish which intensifies the other severe reactions, such as guilt, anger, confusion and depression.”<sup>7</sup>

As I began writing my screenplay these additional stages that suicide survivors experience: guilt, anger, confusion and depression were the emotions that I became most interested in exploring and I feel I was able to give voice to these in my screenplay.

I discovered that no matter how seemingly important I believed my story of surviving the death of a loved one by suicide was; it was naive of me to set out to write fiction with some false obligation to the public. I had set myself a lofty and unachievable goal.

In my GLS foundation year we read Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, where she wrote, "...it is much more important to be oneself than anything else. Do not dream of influencing other people...Think of things in themselves." <sup>8</sup>

During the process of writing my screenplay, I found Woolf's advice against moralizing, to be invaluable as I continually reminded myself to focus on writing a good story with no attachment to the result.

### **Truth vs. Fiction**

I began my screenplay wanting to use my own personal experience as inspiration. My experience of grief was in my mid-30s when I survived the suicide of my common-law partner. His death was excruciatingly painful but an experience that also began a journey of profound discovery.

Although my screenplay is a work of fiction I drew heavily from my experience and ten journals I wrote in the year after the death of my partner.

What I discovered was the immense complexity of writing something so closely autobiographical. In the end, I think I wrote a script that was neither autobiographical or fiction but rather auto-fiction.

I had thought that it would be emotionally difficult, and this was true, however what surprised me was how difficult it was to write a compelling story based on my own life. I always knew that I didn't want to just to transcribe my journals which would have been ultimately voyeuristic, self-absorbed, and most likely poor storytelling.

Still, I struggled to look deeply into the self without navel gazing or being too self-referential. I was grateful to have over 20 years distance since the death of my partner to find a space enough removed from the paralysing emotions of the past to fictionalize it. I found myself in a liminal space between remembering the past and then letting go of many of the facts to illuminate a greater truth.

It was an interesting creative boundary. Perhaps a writing space that Dara Marks refers to as crossing the borderland, “The place that lies between what we know and what we are coming to know about ourselves and others is sometimes referred to as the borderland.”<sup>9</sup>

This was a challenging and yet ultimately rewarding place to be.

## Notes

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2. Goethe, Johann Wolfgang Von. *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 27.
3. Durkheim, Emile, *Le suicide: etude de sociologie*, 312-332.
4. Miller, John. *On Suicide: Great Writers on the Ultimate Question*, 107.
5. Wolf, Ernst S. *Psychology of the Self and Literature*, 45.
6. Staudacher, Carol. *Beyond Grief*, 174.
7. Staudacher, Carol. *Beyond Grief*, 183.
8. Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*, 111.
9. Marks, Dara. *Inside Story: The Power of the Transformational Arc*, 3.



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**Appendix.**

**Script: Treading Water**

**TREADING WATER**

Written by

Michele Lendra McMahon

December 17, 2020

Don't turn your head.  
Keep looking at the bandaged place.  
That's where the light enters you.  
And don't believe for a moment  
that you're healing yourself."  
- Rumi

1

**EXT. OCEAN - DAY (AUGUST 27, 1997)**

A kaleidoscope of blues, greens, and yellows refract through splashing water.

Slowly the wake of a Hobbie-cat sailing fast on a Pacific West Coast ocean comes into view.

Then we see two women in wetsuits clipped into harnesses.

EMMA (EM), early 30s, wet hair, natural vibe, is in the stern, hand on the tiller, confident, in control, almost happy.

DEIDRE (DEE DEE), late 20s, carefree, perhaps careless, with her toes on the edge of the hull, leans out over the water and dips her head in the waves. She laughs full of joy.

EM

Cut it out.

DEE DEE

What? You got it.

EM

Let's tack.

Em, in charge, of the boat and her sister, pushes the tiller to starboard and as the boom swings they duck and scramble to the other side in unison.

They hike-out to the edge and give each other an adrenaline smile. What could be better?

A dude on a Jet-ski sees the girls and guns it way too close. His wake pushes the boat up on it's side.

Dee Dee's harness SNAPS and she flies into the water.

The boat almost flips but Em throws all her weight back, lets the sail out, flattens the boat, and then slowly turns to collect her sister treading water in the distance.

She stalls the sail, unclips her harness, and leans over to give her sister a hand up to the trampoline.

EM (CONT'D)

You okay?

DEE DEE

Fucking Jet-Dick!

Dee Dee "flips the bird" at the Jet-ski dude long gone.

Em looks his way.

EM  
Sea-Douche!

Then grabs the loose end of Dee Dee's harness.

EM (CONT'D)  
Weren't you clipped in?

DEE DEE  
It came loose. I was getting hot  
anyway.

EM  
Didn't you double check?

DEE DEE  
Of course mom!

EM  
I'm so, not, being a mom.

DEE DEE  
Ya, a little bit.

Em caught out, is silent.

DEE DEE (CONT'D)  
I've been an adult for a while now.

Em hooks her sister into the harness.

EM  
That's debatable.

Dee Dee shoves Em into the water.

Em looks up from underwater at the distorted pale green  
sunlight shimmering through the ocean.

She waits a moment then kicks to the surface, floats and  
looks up at the sky, finally a smile on her face.

2 **EXT. EMMA'S APT - DAY**

Dee Dee in the driver seat of a VW van covered in surfing and  
environmental stickers: "Forever Stoked" and "May the Forest  
Be with You".

She wears overalls, one strap down over her bikini and we see  
her toned arms and 1990s Chinese tattoo. (If you read "Hanzi"  
it means "family").



Em wears an extra-large, I've-stopped-caring, T-shirt that hides her almost-fit body.

They pull up to an older, beautifully renovated, three-story walk-up. Expensive.

EM  
I miss this.

DEE DEE  
I miss you.

Em smiles, a little sad.

DEE DEE (CONT'D)  
I never see you.

EM  
It's just... it's hard.

DEE DEE  
No, it's not.  
(pause)  
When does Hudson get back?

EM  
Not for three more days.

DEE DEE  
Hope it's been good for him to see his family.

Em smiles weakly.

EM  
Thanks for a great sail.

She gets out of the passenger seat, grabs her wetsuit, and waves goodbye.

3 **INT. EMMA'S BEDROOM - DAY**

An unmade queen-size bed, men's clothes thrown over a chair, a lived-in space, shared by two.

The LIGHT on an ANSWERING MACHINE beeps. Em looks at it. Conflicted. Doesn't check it.

Em picks up a men's old BLUE SWEATER on the bed and breathes in her absent boyfriend, Hudson. Then tosses it, and a few pillows, on the floor. She turns her back to the phone and stretches out to enjoy the entire bed to herself.

**INT. EMMA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (AUGUST 28, 1997 2:00AM)**

Pitch black. Until a single light on a cordless phone vibrates and illuminates the silhouette of Em asleep. Her arm appears from under a comforter, grabs the phone and pulls it under the covers.

EM  
Hello.

MIGUEL  
Emma?

EM  
Miguel?

MIGUEL  
Are you alone?

EM  
Of course I'm alone.

The covers fall off and the phone's light reveals Emma's concerned face.

EM (CONT'D)  
What are you talking about? What's going on?

MIGUEL  
Can you call someone?

EM  
Is it Hudson?

Silence.

MIGUEL  
He died. He's dead.

Shock on Emma's face. Long silence. Holding her breath... then gasping for air.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)  
Emma? Emma! Fuck. I wish you weren't alone.

EM  
Stop saying that. Who would be with me?

MIGUEL  
I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

Miguel cries. Emma waits for him to pull it together. He doesn't.

EM  
What happened?

MIGUEL  
He killed himself.

EM  
When?

MIGUEL  
Yesterday.

EM  
What?!

MIGUEL  
It took a while to find me. They had his ID but it took a while... the coroner came tonight. It's him. I didn't see him. They wouldn't let me. But it's him. You know he had metal in his ankle and that stupid Batman tattoo.

EM  
I can't...

MIGUEL  
Should I call your sister?

Em hangs up the phone. We are plunged into darkness and silence.

The phone begins to ring and ring, casting light on Em gasping like a fish tossed on the land.

**AND OVER BLACK, THE TITLE CARD:**

**DROWNING**

5      **INT. EMMA'S BEDROOM - DAY**

Pale morning light streams through the window. Emma, in bed, her eyes wide open, staring at nothing.

Loud bangs on the door, turn of a key, and quick footsteps.

DEE DEE (O.S.)

Em it's me.

Dee Dee enters the room, sees Em, drops her bag and keys, and begins to cry.

She climbs into bed with Em, spoons her. No words available or required.

The phone rings. Emma doesn't react.

Dee Dee looks towards it, hesitates, then picks it up.

DEE DEE (CONT'D)

No, it's me Dee Dee. Yes, I'm here now. I know, I know... Look. I'll call you later.

She hangs up and looks at Emma.

DEE DEE (CONT'D)

That was Miguel. He's worried. He called me.

She looks at Em who stares at an invisible horizon.

Dee Dee jumps to action. Dials another number.

DEE DEE (CONT'D)

Hi this is Emma's sister Deidre. She won't be into work today. No, No, she's fine. Well not. It's just. There's been a death in the family. No, I don't know when. Okay, yes I will.

Dee Dee looks at Em.

DEE DEE (CONT'D)

I'm going to call Dad now.

Em looks at Dee Dee for the first time. This makes it real. She forgets to breathe as if underwater until she gasps for air and unnatural sobs fight to be released.

Dee Dee, who has never seen her big sister fall apart, breaks down, and drops the phone to the ground.

Both lost in a sea of grief with no map to navigate. Both drowning.

6           **INT. EMMA'S BEDROOM - DAY (AUGUST 29, 1997)**

Em wakes. A split second of peace before she sees Hudson's BLUE SWEATER on the floor, and the ANSWERING MACHINE message still flashing.

The weight of her new reality crashes down on her.

She hears muffled voices in the apartment.

She lies paralyzed, unable to go into the world today.

7           **INT. EMMA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Minimal modern furniture. A Mexican blanket tossed over a HUGE GREY COUCH is the only attempt at feeling like a home.

Dee Dee awkwardly arranges flowers in vases, then any container she can find and places them wherever she can find space in the apartment.

Her father, MR. GEORGE BAKIRTZIS, (Mr. B) only 60 but aged by a life he was never resilient enough to live, sits at the far end of the couch, lost.

Dee Dee joins him.

AUNT MARGARET, 65, too put-together for the August heat or death, walks in the open front door.

She waits impatiently with a huge bouquet of lilies. Then walks purposely over to Dee Dee and Mr. B - her brother.

MARGARET

Hi Deidre, George, these are for  
Emma.

Mr. B barely looks up at Marg. Nods.

DEE DEE

Thanks Marg.

Margaret clearly doesn't like being called Marg.

Dee Dee takes the flowers and Marg into the kitchen.

8           **INT. EMMA'S KITCHEN - DAY**

A Mexican vibe with a cheeky wooden angel on the fridge that points a chubby judgey finger.

Dee Dee can't find anything even resembling a vase and puts the lilies in a cooking pot.

AIDEN, 30s, rumped, calm, confident, (think younger brother of Chris O'Dowd) makes coffee. He's the love of Dee Dee's life. She just hasn't fully accepted it yet.

AIDEN  
Margaret, been a while.

Margaret looks around.

MARGARET  
Is Emma here?

DEE DEE  
She's not up to seeing people right now.

MARGARET  
Of course. Such a terrible thing. I'm having a hard time with it. I can only imagine. After your mother died...

This upsets Dee Dee but doesn't register with Marg. She leans in.

MARGARET (CONT'D)  
What happened?

DEE DEE  
He died. He killed himself.

MARGARET  
I know, but how?

Dee Dee looks to her dad adrift in the living room.

Aiden throws her a lifeline.

AIDEN  
Dee Dee, luv, I need some help with the coffee.

He gives her a tray with mugs as he grabs the coffee pot and heads to the living room.

Margaret abandoned, with no juicy details, grabs flowers out of someone else's vase and swaps them for her lilies.

**INT. EMMA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Aiden serves coffee, everyone grateful for the distraction.

AIDEN

Black?

Mr. B nods.

STEVE, 30s, tall, broad shouldered, burly, enters with a tupperware of food. He puts it down as soon as he sees Dee Dee and sweeps her into a big hug. He's friends with both sisters and he and Emma would be perfect for each other, if he wasn't gay.

STEVE

Oh Dee Dee. I'm so sorry. How's Em?

DEE DEE

Not good.

Dee Dee fights to hold it together now that Steve, a safe harbour, has arrived.

STEVE

Of course.

He picks up the Tupperware.

STEVE (CONT'D)

I brought her favourite veggie casserole. I know she probably doesn't want to eat. But you can freeze it. Maybe cut it up in smaller portions before you put in the freezer...

He realizes that he is rambling, stops, takes a moment, notices Mr. B and extends a hand.

STEVE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I'm Steve. You must be Em and Dee Dee's dad?

DEE DEE

Oh sorry. Dad this is Steve, a good friend of Em's and mine. Oh and this is our dad. You got that.

Mr. B tries to get out of his seat while still shaking Steve's hand and holding his cup of coffee. Steve tightens his grip and hauls him up with ease.

MR. B

Yes, Yes, Em's talked about you.  
You're on the same swim team.

Margaret, clearly left out, extends her hand to Steve and looks him up and down.

MARGARET

And I'm Margaret, Emma's aunt. And  
Deidre's of course.

Steve, suddenly awkward, looks to Dee Dee.

STEVE

Oh I'm sorry, I didn't know this  
was just family. When you called I  
wanted to come over and... I'm  
going to leave.

DEE DEE

No, No, it's okay, thank you. Stay.

Margaret still assessing Steve.

MARGARET

You're on the gay swim team?

Dee Dee wants to punch her.

Steve who has navigated this level of awkward and much, much worse, charms.

STEVE

Yes, Em was our coach so it was  
only fair she swim with us and  
besides she likes boys too.

Margaret, confused and embarrassed, looks to Dee Dee for help. But she will not get any.

STEVE (CONT'D)

You all must be tired and Em  
probably needs quiet. I'm going to  
leave.

AIDEN

We should all leave Em alone.  
Margaret do you need a lift  
anywhere?

Margaret, offended, grabs her keys from her purse.

MARGARET

I'm fine.



And as she heads for the door.

MARGARET (CONT'D)  
Maybe look after George.

Moments later outside Em's door. Dee Dee knocks.

DEE DEE  
Everyone is gone. Aiden and I are  
taking Dad to my place. You're  
alone. There's coffee.

10     **INT. EMMA'S LIVING ROOM**

Em opens the door and shuffles into the living room, puffy-faced, wearing the BLUE SWEATER she tossed on the floor. It's torn in the elbows. She grabs someone's coffee and goes back to her bedroom.

11     **INT. EMMA'S BEDROOM**

Em pulls her comforter around her, a wall against the world.

12     **INT. EMMA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY (SUNDAY, AUGUST 31, 1997)**

Em lies on the couch an un-showered mess, eyes fixed on the television.

TV SCREEN shows footage of a mangled Mercedes in the Paris tunnel. Police vehicles, ambulances, and blue, orange and red lights flash. (All news footage in the script is transcribed BBC coverage.)

NEWS ANCHOR  
There has been a terrible accident  
involving Diana the Princess of  
Wales in Paris.  
(pause)  
She is now said to be in intensive  
care in Pitie-Salpetriere Hospital.  
We don't know precisely her  
condition at this time we have had  
reports that she has a concussion.

News anchor adjusts his ear piece.

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)

We can now confirm that within the last few moments, the press association in Britain, sighting unknown British sources, has reported that Diana Princess of Wales has died. This has not yet been confirmed by any official source. Her death was reported at 4:00am this morning at the Pitie-Salpetriere Hospital.

(pause)

She died as a result of her injuries sustained at 12:23 this morning in a car accident in the Pont de l'Alma tunnel in Paris France. The other occupants of the car Dodi Fayed and the driver Henri Paul were pronounced dead at the scene. Bodyguard Trevor Rees-Jones remains in serious condition.

Dee Dee walks into the room with two coffees. Sits beside Em.

Em's phone rings. She flinches, then ignores it.

DEE DEE

Do you want me to check it?

Em picks up the phone like it was the cause of all of her pain and has a one-sided conversation, with her listening.

EM

Oh, okay.

Em hangs up and stares at Dee.

EM (CONT'D)

It was Miguel. He and his mom are going to be here tomorrow. They want to go through Hudson's things.

DEE DEE

What? It's your stuff. Yours and his. You're living together. What else did he say? When is the funeral?

Em, despondent, looks at everything in the apartment and her life with Hudson.

EM

He didn't say.

**INT. EMMA'S LIVING ROOM**

MIGUEL, 30s, tall, dark, a hint of Latino, stands uncomfortably holding a box.

GENEVIEVE (Ginger), 60s, short, dark, definitely Latina despite her dyed red hair, packs CDs and books in a box.

Em sits resigned and Dee Dee stands with her arms crossed.

Ginger eyes some black & white photos of Hudson and Em on the wall.

GINGER

Are these his?

DEE DEE

No, Em took them. And framed them.

EM

It's okay. Take them. I have the negatives.

Em takes the photos off the wall and gives them to Ginger whose hands shake as she looks at her son's images.

She gently packs them into the box except one that she leaves on the ground.

It shows mostly Em in the photo smiling with Hudson awkwardly in profile kissing her. She's just in the frame almost pulling away and he's in profile, wearing a BLUE PLAID SHIRT. (This is the only image we will ever see of Hudson.)

Dee Dee picks it up and hugs it to her chest.

DEE DEE

So when is the funeral?

Miguel and Ginger share a look of horrific guilt.

MIGUEL

There's something we have to tell you.

Ginger carries her box towards the door.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

We sort of already had one.

EM

What?

DEE DEE  
What the fuck?

MIGUEL  
It's just... we had him cremated  
and thought his ashes should go  
into the ocean near our home.

EM  
But. I would have come... Why  
didn't you tell me?

GINGER  
We didn't want anyone there. Just  
family. We couldn't have a funeral.

DEE DEE  
Of course you could have. And we  
are his family too.

GINGER  
We couldn't. Not after... We just  
wanted it over.

The box slips from Ginger's hands and the glass frames SMASH.

Em jumps but has no words. She tears-up but has no tears.

Ginger stares at the box then leaves.

Miguel awkwardly hauls her box of smashed photos on top of  
his.

MIGUEL  
Sorry.

The door shuts behind him with finality.

DEE DEE  
Well Fuck Me. Seriously. What the  
fuck?

EM  
I guess that's it.

DEE DEE  
What do you mean?

EM  
I don't know. No funeral. No stuff.  
No photos. No Hudson. Done.

Dee Dee silently mouths "fuck" one more time.

**INT. EMMA'S LIVING ROOM DAY (WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 1997)**

Em sits on the couch, feet on the coffee table, same filthy clothes. Yellow pollen from the Lily bouquet has dusted the coffee table and smears into her blue socks.

She watches more news reports about Lady Di.

TV SCREEN shows thousands of people crowded onto the grounds outside of Kensington Palace. Piles of flowers blanket the ground and are tied to the fence.

Tearful strangers hug each other or cling at the fence.

**REPORTER**

More than a million bouquets of flowers have been left at Diana Princess of Wales's home at Kensington Palace. As a nation collectively grieves there is still no word from the Queen.

**ELDER LADY**

I think our Queen should be here in London with her people. This is her nation and they should know how all her people feel about Diana.

**MIDDLE AGE WOMAN**

I think they treated her terrible. Absolutely shocking. I don't think. I think they are the most cold people on this earth.

Dee Dee enters the living room and is shocked at Em's state.

**DEE DEE**

Have you eaten? Slept?

Em continues to watch TV. Dee Dee grabs the remote and turns it off.

**DEE DEE (CONT'D)**

I'm going to make coffee and you're going to take a shower.

15

**INT. EMMA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY (LATER)**

Em with wet hair, same clothes, sits with a coffee in hand and a plate of eggs in front of her.

DEE DEE

What should I tell your work?

EM

Nothing. I'm going in tomorrow.

DEE DEE

Really? You think that's a good idea?

Em grabs the remote and flicks the TV back on.

Dee Dee looks at Em obsessed by the screen. She doesn't have a better idea.

16

**INT. WEB DESIGN OFFICE - DAY**

A web design office, too corporate to ever be cutting edge but soulessly efficient to make money.

Em, barely pulled together, walks the gauntlet of grief. She passes desks of uncomfortable colleagues who look away and focus on their computer screens or tilt their heads with controlled empathetic faces.

Em escapes in her cubicle, flips on her computer and dives into her emails.

Her boss CATRINA, 50s, in charge and never lets anyone forget it, appears like a ghost ship over Em's divider.

CATRINA

Good. You're back. Did you get the Jericho email? We need to get back to them with the web page mock-up by tomorrow. You can work late?  
(Not really a question.)

EM

Of course.

Em happy to be left alone and distracted, grabs her work like a life raft.

Out of her sight, colleagues pass a sympathy card around to be signed with a brown envelope for money.

As people arrive they silently gesture at Em's cubicle mouthing "yes she's here"

SHELLY, 30s, the office salad club organizer, pops her head over Em's divider like a prairie dog.

SHELLY

I, we, are so sorry for your loss.

Shelly scoots around the side of the cubicle and thrusts a massive bouquet at Em with the now signed card.

Shelly fights back tears. This is so hard for her. She's so empathetic.

Em takes the flowers and card in awkward silence. Why doesn't everyone just let her get back to work.

Shelley runs away. As she returns to her desk she passes PATTI, 30s, her usual chipper self, saying hello to everyone and making her way to Em's cubicle.

Colleagues shake their heads "no". Too late.

Patti sees the flowers.

PATTI

Hey, I didn't know it was your birthday?

EM

My boyfriend died.

The words spill from Em's gut like a sniper shot. While Patti stares at the carnage.

PATTI

I'm so sorry. Oh my god. I've been away. I didn't know. I'm so sorry. When?

EM

Three days ago.

PATTI

How?

That question completely guts Em.

EM  
I gotta go.

Em grabs her purse and escapes to the bathroom.

17        **INT. OFFICE BATHROOM - DAY**

Em hyperventilates, then crashes into the toilet and dry heaves.

She washes her face, gags down some water, spits it up. Catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror and leaves. No self-reflective moment here.

18        **EXT. OFFICE ELEVATORS - DAY**

Em presses desperately on the down button.

Shelly catches up with the massive bouquet of flowers and thrusts them into her arms.

SHELLY  
Don't forget these.

The elevator opens. DING. Em enters wordless.

The elevator closes. DING. Em's face is obscured by flowers.

19        **INT. OFFICE LOBBY - DAY**

Em walks out of the building and tosses the flowers into a garbage bin near the exit.

20        **INT. EMMA'S APT - DAY**

**MONTAGE**

Em enters her apartment looking for refuge and is confronted with dozens of more flowers in varying stages of decay in vases around her LIVING ROOM.

Em enters the KITCHEN, opens a drawer, grabs a garbage bag, and marches back to the living room.



Em grabs a bouquet of flowers and tosses it in the bag, card and all. She reads a card on another bouquet and shakes her head. Then tosses it in the bag.

She snatches another bouquet and topples its vase. SMASH.

Em sits on the floor, stares at the shattered glass as it reflects sunlight in puddles of water. No tears.

## BACK TO SCENE

21

### INT. EMMA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY (LATER)

Em stares at a muted television set. Dee Dee cleans up glass shards that have flown into corners and tosses them into a large bag of massacred flowers.

DEE DEE

You said you cleaned up?

EM

You know there are now fiv feet of flowers outside Kensington Palace? The bottom layer is decomposing. Who has to deal with all of that?

DEE DEE

You have to stop watching that.

Aiden enters the living room from the kitchen with two plates of delicious food.

AIDEN

My famous Irish burritos. Lots of spicy potatoes.

He sets a plate in front of Em.

DEE DEE

Why don't you cook like that for me?

AIDEN

Well when we move in maybe I will. If you do that thing for me?

This gets Em's attention.

EM  
(to Aiden)  
You're moving in?

DEE DEE  
Yes, we decided before...just we  
don't know when yet.

Aiden shoots Dee Dee a "what?" look behind Em's back.

DEE DEE (CONT'D)  
Is that mine?

She looks at the plate Aiden holds now as a reluctant offering.

22      **INT. EMMA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

Em trudges out of her bedroom, drags her comforter to the couch and curls into a ball.

She flicks the remote control mechanically and the TV's cold blue light washes over her exhausted, sleepless face as waves of late night talk shows and infomercials crash up against each other.

23      **EXT. EMMA'S APT BUILDING - DAY**

Em exits her apartment. A week of sleepless nights and unwashed clothes hang off her.

MAVIS, 60s, wears a life time of entitlement in her buttoned up cardigan, approaches determined.

MAVIS  
Emma, I haven't received your rent  
this month?  
(awkward pause)  
I wouldn't normally bother you,  
Hudson is always so good, but it's  
over a week now.

EM  
I'm sorry. I'll write you a cheque.

Mavis stands her ground. Her body says now.

Em scrounges in her purse for a cheque and pen and slowly writes out a number in quiet panic. She can't afford this place on her own.

MAVIS

I haven't seen Hudson around.  
Is he away for work?

Em takes a moment to hold it together.

EM

Hudson died.  
That's why the rent is late.

Mavis embarrassed.

MAVIS

Oh I'm sorry. I had no idea.  
Will you be staying here without  
him?

Em stares in disbelief. Hurt. Struggles with the truth, that  
no, she can't stay.

EM

I gotta go to work.

24

**INT. WEB OFFICE - DAY**

Em rushes to her desk. She's late. Her boss Catrina sees her  
and is at her cubicle before she can fire up her computer.

CATRINA

I read an article that said  
employees who are grieving are  
excellent workers because they  
focus all of their energy on work.

Em is stunned.

I appreciate that you stayed late  
to get the Jericho website done but  
then you called in sick and today  
you're late. I hope this isn't the  
way it's going to be.

Em looks at Catrina. Then at her computer. Logs in. She tries  
to keep it together.

CATRINA (CONT'D)

Good. Please check your email  
about the new Dunbar account.

Catrina walks away. Em stares at her screen. Breathes. She looks at a photo of her and Hudson (the same one Dee Dee kept) push-pinned on her cubicle wall and takes it down.

She pulls down all of her photos, calendar, and shoves them in her purse.

Opens her drawers and grabs granola bars, hand cream, rubber bands and tries to stuff them into her purse. Not fitting.

She grabs the recycling bin under her desk. Empties all the remaining belongings of her desk into it, grabs a sad cactus plant and marches out of the office.

Colleagues' heads pop-up over cubicles. Shelly shocked. Patti smiles. And Catrina from the one glassed-in proper office is gobsmacked.

25

**INT. EMMA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Em sits on her grey couch, hugs her purse and recycling bin of work crap.

Dee Dee sits across from her concerned.

DEE DEE

Well, you'll just have to move in  
with me.

EM

But Aiden was going to move in?

DEE DEE

He can wait. You can't afford this  
place on your own and you just lost  
your job. Yes?

EM

Pretty sure. Ya.

DEE DEE

Okay let's get you moved in.

26

**INT. EMMA LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Half-filled boxes, suitcases and bags fill the apartment. A dismantled life.

Dee Dee holds up a box of records and negotiates with Em.

DEE DEE  
My place, storage, sell, or Sally  
Ann?

Em doesn't look, doesn't care.

EM  
Sell.

Dee Dee puts them on the "sell" pile on the couch.

As they turn to sort through more stuff Aiden grabs the albums off the couch, and puts them in a bankers box, with other belongings, in a pile next to him.

Dee Dee grabs some of Hudson's clothes and few random belongings.

EM (CONT'D)  
Give it all away. No, wait.

Em grabs the BLUE SWEATER with torn elbows from the Sally Ann pile.

27

**EXT. EMMA'S APARTMENT - DAY**

Steve and Aiden carry her GREY COUCH down the front steps and into a rental truck.

STEVE  
Last time we did this we were  
moving Dee Dee out of Em's place.  
Never thought it'd be the other way  
around.

AIDEN  
Didn't see this coming.

STEVE

It's always been the two of them.  
Em practically brought Dee Dee up.  
When their mom died, their  
dad...well you know.

AIDEN

I knew it was a package deal. Just  
not so cozy.

Steve stops and gives Aiden a look.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

I know. I know. I'm being a dick.

STEVE

No just a dude in love.

AIDEN

Is it that obvious?

STEVE

To everyone but Dee Dee. Those  
girls put up quite the walls. But  
if you can break through, it's  
worth it.

They both heft the couch up higher with renewed resolve.

28

**INT. DEE DEE'S LIVING ROOM - DAYS LATER**

Dee Dee's apartment is a mix of Hawaiian Tiki, surf, hippie  
wholesomeness with a rock'n edge.

The tiny kitchen is open to a living room area.

Boxes and garbage bags overflowing with Em's belongings are  
piled into corners.

Dee Dee makes up the grey couch into a bed.

EM

It's only til I get... my life  
back.

DEE DEE

I know.

Dee Dee barely keeps it together.

DEE DEE (CONT'D)  
Besides how many times have you  
bailed me out? Happy to do this.

Em curls up on the couch and Dee Dee joins her.

EM  
I don't know what to do now.

DEE DEE  
How about you do nothing for a  
while?

Dee Dee leaves and Em turns on the TV and sinks into the deep  
blue glow.

29 **INT. DEE DEE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY (SEPTEMBER 6, 1997)**

Dee Dee arrives home from work to find Em on the grey couch,  
which has become her island of grief, surrounded by dirty  
clothes and junk food.

Em in her sweats-PJs, watches more Lady Di while shoveling  
chips in her mouth.

DEE DEE  
It's been weeks, why are they still  
showing this? I mean Mother Teresa  
died yesterday and that's already  
old news.

EM  
Shhhhhh.

TV SCREEN shows footage of Prince William (15) And Prince  
Harry (12) as they walk behind Lady Diana's funeral casket.

We see Em's reflection in the TV screen.

NEWS ANCHOR  
All over London people have lined  
the route in some places 10 people  
deep.

(MORE)

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)

Their thoughts turn away from their own feelings of grief to what should not be forgotten, that this was the mother of two young children, one of whom will become king.

The TV shows thousands of people weeping, wailing.

EM

Why are all of those people there? Why are they crying? They didn't even know her.

NEWS ANCHOR

The decision was made to keep this as informal as possible so there will be no soldiers, no bands, no muffled drums, no funeral music.

EM

Seriously. Bands? Music?

Em continues to mindlessly eat chips.

NEWS ANCHOR

A very simple sad sight of a single coffin being carried on a gun carriage.

(pause)

The coffin with the royal standard and three wreaths of white lilies, one from her brother Charles Spencer and the other two from the princes - Prince William and Prince Harry. A simple card on the first of these wreaths saying "Mummy".

Em stops eating. A lump in her throat. She drops the chip bag on the couch.

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)

Walking down the distinctive red road of the mall. The Duke of Edinburgh on the left, Prince William with his head bowed, Charles Spenser, the little figure of the red-headed Prince Harry and the Prince of Wales. Behind them the 500 members of charities who benefited by her work.

(MORE)



NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)

Silence except heavy gravel crunch  
of the horse guards feet on the  
gravel of the mall.

(pause)

And still Prince William with his  
head hung, walking next to his  
grandfather

EM

(unravelling)

Christ, you lose your mother then  
you have to put on a show. They're  
just kids.

Dee Dee puts the chip bag on the coffee table. Brushes chips  
off the couch and sits beside her.

DEE DEE

I know. It's fucked-up.

She gently pries the remote out of Em's hand and turns off  
the TV.

DEE DEE (CONT'D)

We were just kids too you know. Mom  
was about the same age as...

EM

That's not why I'm angry.

DEE DEE

I know, I know. It's just you  
were... when Dad wasn't... and I  
want to be here now but...

Dee Dee almost losing it but regroups. And tries to deflect  
with humour.

DEE DEE (CONT'D)

I can handle you living on my  
couch. I can handle that you don't  
have a job and that you don't  
shower.

(laugh/cry)

But... I don't, I don't know how to  
handle this. This... you need to  
talk to someone.

EM

We don't do that.

**INT. COUNSELLOR OFFICE - DAY**

A typical medical office with the exception of a warm lit lamp, red and orange pillows, and a Buddha.

DR. METCALF, 30s, too young and too handsome to have any wisdom to share. Or is he an old soul? One ear is pierced with a tiny Batman stud.

Em sits on the edge of his couch not convinced of his qualifications on the wall.

DR. METCALF  
Why are you here?

EM  
My boyfriend killed himself.

DR. METCALF  
Yes, but why are you here?

EM  
I want to feel better.

DR. METCALF  
And how do you feel now?

EM  
I don't know.

DR. METCALF  
How long has it been since...  
(Looks at his notes)  
Hudson's death?

EM  
A month.

DR. METCALF  
And you don't know how you are  
feeling but you want to feel  
better.

EM  
I'm fine.

DR. METCALF  
Fine isn't an emotion.

EM  
I'm fine. I'm not falling apart.

DR. METCALF  
And what would 'falling apart' look like?

EM  
I don't know. Crying hysterically all the time.

DR. METCALF  
Have you cried?

EM  
Sure. I had a cry.

DR. METCALF  
A cry. But not hysterically?

EM  
No.

DR. METCALF  
What would that look like?

EM  
You know. Out of control.

DR. METCALF  
So your crying is under control.

EM  
I just want my life back.

DR. METCALF  
And what would that look like?  
What was your life like before Hudson died?

EM  
Sad.

DR. METCALF  
Before he died? You were sad?

EM  
No. I don't know why I said that.  
Look I just want to move forward.  
Get a job, an apartment, and not feel so bad all the time.  
I want to move forward.

DR. METCALF  
Good. You don't want your life back. You want to move forward.  
(MORE)

DR. METCALF (CONT'D)

(pause)

Your life will never be the same.  
Hudson's death, his suicide, is now  
a part of your life. We can work to  
help you live forward but first we  
are going to have to look  
backwards. Are you okay with that?

Em silent. She is not okay with that.

31

**EXT. COUNSELLOR OFFICE - DAY**

Em pauses on the steps and exhales shallow awkward breaths of  
someone who holds everything in.

It pours rain, she's oblivious, and gets soaked.

A man runs by, his face partially obscured as he covers from  
the rain, but his profile and the BLUE PLAID SHIRT make him a  
dead ringer for the photo of Hudson we've seen.

He disappears in the crowd. Em's heart races, eyes water, she  
holds her breath. What the fuck!?

STEVE (O.S.)

Em, Em.

Steve waves to get Em's attention.

STEVE (CONT'D)

Dee Dee couldn't make it and sent  
me. Are you okay?

Em shakes it off. Of course that wasn't Hudson.

Steve pulls his umbrella over both of them and she tries to  
hold it for them. He laughs and holds it higher.

STEVE (CONT'D)

Seriously?

They walk in comfortable silence for a while.

EM

He's really young.

STEVE  
Like Doogie Howser young?

EM  
No, he's maybe 30.

STEVE  
Okay, old enough to earn a medical degree.

EM  
Shouldn't a counsellor be older and wiser and wear a cardigan? He has a Batman earring for god sake.

Steve cringes at the earring.

STEVE  
A Harrison Ford "one" earring? He's obviously straight and may have some superhero issues. But... then he may also be highly motivated to help you.

Em is not impressed.

STEVE (CONT'D)  
Look maybe if he's your age he can relate better?

No answer.

STEVE (CONT'D)  
Wanna go for a swim? The boys miss you.

EM  
No. I just want to go home.

STEVE  
Come on. Everything is better after a swim.

EM  
(testy)  
Is it?

STEVE  
I meant. You know.. it's always been how you worked things out.

EM  
Not this time.

32      **INT. DEE DEE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Em tosses her bag on her sofa, bed, nest of grief. She's wet, cold.

She pulls off her sweater and then struggles to take off her wet socks. She hops on one foot, off balance, and bangs her knee on the coffee table. Fuck that hurt.

She hobbles to the bathroom.

**INT. DEE DEE'S BATHROOM - DAY**

An old dingy bathroom thinly camouflaged in Hawaiian kitsch.

Em pushes the palm tree shower curtain back and turns on the bathtub's hot water.

She stares at herself in a mermaid mirror, emotionless, until it steams up and shrouds her image.

33      **INT. DEE DEE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY (LATER)**

Dee Dee follows a trail of wet clothes to the bathroom door.

DEE DEE  
Are you okay?

No response. Dee Dee knocks louder. Frightened.

DEE DEE (CONT'D)  
Em!

EM  
(from behind door)  
I'm fine. Got caught in the rain.

Dee Dee slides her back down the bathroom door, sits, and tears fall silently.

DEE DEE  
Okay. Can I get you anything?

34      **INT. DEE DEE'S BATHROOM - DAY**

Em sits in the bathtub hugging her knees.

EM  
No. I'm fine.

She turns on the tap for more hot water and slowly puts her head underwater drowning the truth. Maybe tears, hard to tell. As she closes her eyes we go to BLACK.

AND OVER BLACK, THE TITLE CARD

TREADING WATER

35 INT. DEE DEE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY (AUGUST 31, 1998 - ONE YEAR LATER)

Em is a chubby mess. She and the grey couch are worse for wear. She eats junk food, in sloppy sweats. She's clearly eating her grief and numbing any pain with TV.

She's in a TV trance.

NEWS ANCHOR

It's the one-year anniversary of the tragic death of Diana Princess of Wales and for many the loss is still hard to comprehend.

(pause)

Recent studies reveal that suicide rates of women in close age to Diana -- 25-45-- rose 45% in the month after Lady Di's death.

BANG. The door crashes open.

Em JUMPS, grabs her heart, and hyperventilates.

Dee Dee and Aiden crash through the entrance laughing and pull each other's clothes off.

They are half way across the living room when they notice Em.

DEE DEE

You said you were going out with Steve.

As Dee Dee pulls her shirt back on she clocks Em's state.

DEE DEE (CONT'D)  
Em what's wrong?

EM  
Nothing. You just startled me.

AIDEN  
We thought...

Aiden skulks off to Dee Dee's room. Makes a corny, sexy Backstreet Boys' move (no Magic Mike in 1997)

Only Dee Dee can see. She shrugs "I don't know?" to Aiden. Em notices.

EM  
Oh, Oh?! I'm sorry. I can go out.

Em pulls on Hudson's BLUE SWEATER (the holes in the elbows are larger), grabs sneakers and a bag from under her pile of clothes.

EM (CONT'D)  
Sure. Ya, I'm going...out.

She schlumps out the door. Neither Dee Dee, Aiden, or Em entirely convinced she'll make it outside - even after the door closes.

36 **INT. DEE DEE'S BEDROOM - DAY**

A feminine hippie love cave where Aiden has clearly left a few belongings. He's not moved in but a regular overnight guest.

Aiden, his shirt off and pants undone, kneels on the bed.

DEE DEE  
Should I go after her?

AIDEN  
No, no she'll be fine. Fresh air.  
It'll be good.

Dee Dee is not convinced. Aiden tries to convince.

AIDEN (CONT'D)  
I'll be quick.  
I'm your one-minute man.  
(MORE)



AIDEN (CONT'D)  
You'll catch up to her. She's very  
slow these days.

Dee Dee kisses him lovingly. He's encouraged and then she  
turns to leave.

DEE DEE  
I know. It's too much. She's too  
much.

He falls back on the bed... with familiar disappointment.

37

**EXT. BEACH - DAY**

A small, private, sandy cove partially hidden by rocks and  
washed-up logs with a spectacular view.

Dee Dee clambers over a log and walks toward Em who sits on a  
big rock near the ocean.

Dee Dee joins her and they sit in silence for a while  
watching boats sail in the distance.

EM  
I'm sorry.

DEE DEE  
This is a hard week. But you've had  
a lot of them lately. And nights.

Em stares at the horizon.

EM  
People die everyday. I looked it up  
- 149,000 people a day die that's  
6,000 people every hour, 105 every  
minute while we've been sitting  
here. Who are these people and why  
are only some of them remembered?

DEE DEE  
No one has forgotten Hudson. And we  
didn't forget Mom.  
(pause)  
Dad never got over mom. It's been  
30 years and...

Dee Dee gives Em an awkward one-armed hug while Em continues  
her thousand-mile stare.

Em pulls away.

EM  
I'm not Dad.

38

**INT. COUNSELLOR OFFICE - DAY**

Same office. Dr. Metcalf is wearing a Star Wars belt buckle. And a cardigan. Em wonders if he's just watched "Goodwill Hunting, 1998." She's not going to fall into his arms for a tearful Matt Damon hug. Not happening.

DR. METCALF  
So what brings you back?

EM  
Can't sleep. I'm jumpy. Anxious.

DR. METCALF  
What do you mean by jumpy?

EM  
I've always been calm. Well not calm but not easily frightened. And now. The phone rings, a door slams, I jump. And sometimes for no reason my heart races. And I can't sleep.

DR. METCALF  
Anxiety often appears after a traumatic event. You may have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

EM  
(dismissive)  
Ya I don't think so. I wasn't in a war.

DR. METCALF  
Suicide is sudden and violent. Not unlike a murder or a war. And it's not something you can just get over.

EM  
I'm fine. I just need to sleep.

DR. METCALF  
Last time you were here. You said you were fine.  
(looks at his notes)  
(MORE)

DR. METCALF (CONT'D)

"That you just wanted your life back. A job and an apartment. To move forward."

So aside from lack of sleep how's the rest of your life?

Em is silent. All her strength not to cry or punch him.

DR. METCALF (CONT'D)

Emma, in the past year your partner died, you lost your job, and your apartment. These are some of the top stressors in anyone's life... and you're not fine. You have PTSD because you've experienced a traumatic death of a loved one and you're depressed because you haven't grieved.

EM

It's been a year. I've grieved.

DR. METCALF

Time does not heal all wounds, especially if you ignore them.

(pause)

You came to me because you wanted to feel better. Are you feeling better?

Em doubles down, clenches her jaw and fists, and holds her emotions in.

DR. METCALF (CONT'D)

I'd like you to join group therapy.

EM

I'm not a joiner.

DR. METCALF

(No shit Sherlock)

And how's that working out for you?

Em is silent.

DR. METCALF (CONT'D)

Look you need to share with someone. It doesn't need to be me.

He gives her a brochure with a date and time written on it. Em looks at it reluctantly.

EM  
I don't know.

DR. METCALF  
I know you don't. So go and find  
out.

39 **INT.GROUP COUNSELLING ROOM - NIGHT**

A soulless, pale blue, cement walled, basement of a community centre.

Em squeezes the brochure in her hand as she finds a seat in the back of a room of unhappy people.

The COUNSELLOR JUDE, 50s, enters in her long floral maxi dress and purple socks with Birkenstocks. She pins back a streak of "I don't give a shit grey hair" with a barrette. SNAP.

COUNSELLOR JUDE  
Okay everyone. Let's get these  
chairs in a circle.

Slowly chairs are dragged into what almost resembles a circle. With some obvious gaps for personal boundaries.

An unlikely group of reluctant joiners sit down. A 30-something tattooed grunge guy, a 20-something woman in a cropped top and side ponytail, a 40-something woman in purple leggings and a bun in a scrunchy, and a 30-something man in a rumpled suit.

COUNSELLOR JUDE (CONT'D)  
My name is Jude. I'm a counsellor  
with SAFER - Suicide Attempt,  
Follow-up, Education & Research.  
(pause)  
We are all here because we have  
lost someone to suicide.

There is a barely audible but collective sigh from the group. They are in the right place and she said it first. Suicide, the dead elephant in the room that is crushing them all.

COUNSELLOR JUDE (CONT'D)  
I know this is really hard for all  
of you to be here. Let's all just  
take a big breath and exhale.

Counsellor Jude takes a massive inhale with about half the group awkwardly joining and then after what seems like a world record underwater dive - exhales.

Em takes several shallow breaths and fake exhales with the group.

COUNSELLOR JUDE (CONT'D)

I'd like to go around the circle and have you introduce yourself and who in your life died from suicide. I'll start and then we will move to my right. I'm Jude and my mother killed herself when I was 20.

PAUL TATTOO GRUNGE GUY

My name is Paul.  
(excruciating long pause)  
I lost my dad.

NADIA CROP TOP GIRL

My name is Nadia and... my little brother died.

VALERIE MOM WITH SCRUNCHY

My name is Valerie and my son killed himself.

GARY CRUMPLED SUIT GUY

My name is...Gary.

All eyes on Gary who seems to have used all his will to share his name.

COUNSELLOR JUDE

Gary who did you lose to suicide?

GARY CRUMPLED SUIT GUY

My girlfriend.

Em shares a look and forgets that it's her turn.

EM

(super quick)  
My name is Emma and I lost my boyfriend.

Now it's Gary's turn to look her way.

COUNSELLOR JUDE

Thank you everyone. I know how hard that was to share.

(MORE)

COUNSELLOR JUDE (CONT'D)

The death of a loved one is always painful and when they die by suicide it's incredibly difficult to talk about.

I'm sure you all dread that question "How did they die?"

(pause)

There is no easy way to say suicide but it's best to be direct and honest. People have become accustomed to saying "committed" suicide but that is because it was against the law.

PAUL

Well, that's stupid. What are they gonna do put your dead arse in prison?

COUNSELLOR JUDE

Exactly. There was, and unfortunately still is, often a lot of shame left on the family that remains.

(pause)

Now we just say died by suicide or took their life. Whatever you are comfortable with. And no one has a right to know more than what you want to share. Even here. Let's try and share a little more about the people we are grieving. Perhaps the name of the person who died, when they died.

## **MONTAGE**

Overlapping dialogue.

PAUL TATTOO GRUNGE GUY

My dad died two months ago his name was Frank.

(voice cracking)

My mom died the month before... of cancer.

NADIA CROP TOP GIRL

My little brother Tosh was 15. He died two years ago. I've been here before but...

Nadia cries.

VALERIE MOM WITH SCRUNCHY  
My son Daniel would have turned 16  
this month. He died a year ago.

Valerie and Nadia share a look.

GARY CRUMPLED SUIT GUY  
My girlfriend Aiko was 29. She  
killed herself last month in Japan.  
I was working there but...

#### **BACK TO SCENE**

Em, fists clenched, again shares as quickly as possible.

EM  
My boyfriend Hudson was 33. He  
died. He killed himself a year ago  
while he was away visiting his  
family.

Counsellor Jude leaves an uncomfortable amount of silence for  
everyone to just sit with these shares.

COUNSELLOR JUDE  
Some people have lost a loved one  
quite recently, for others it's  
been a year or two.  
(pause)  
"Grief" is a tidy little word but a  
messy process, especially with  
suicide. It will take longer than  
most deaths and you all have the  
added burden of trying to  
understand why.  
(pause)  
This is a question that will never  
be satisfactorily answered. I'm  
here to help you answer questions  
about grieving suicide and I hope  
that we can help each other.  
(pause)  
I want everyone to write down all  
of the different emotions you felt  
when the suicide happened.

Everyone slowly begins to write. Except Em who stares at her  
blank sheet. Finally writing one word.

COUNSELLOR JUDE (CONT'D)  
Now I want you to cross out some of  
the emotions that aren't as strong  
now and circle emotions that you  
are still having problems with.

People make more circles than crosses. Em circles her one word over and over again.

COUNSELLOR JUDE (CONT'D)  
Now let's share what we've written.

Em looks terrified at her paper with the word GUILT.

COUNSELLOR JUDE (CONT'D)  
Why doesn't everyone just say out loud together.

A messy chorus of feelings except for Em who is silent.

GROUP  
Anger, Guilt, Shame, Sad, Numb

COUNSELLOR JUDE  
These are a lot of heavy emotions and our default is to find ways not to feel them....drinking or drugs and that's not good. But if you need to go back to work not to feel for a a few hours that's okay. Better yet get some exercise.  
(pause)  
Everyone put your hand on your heart.

The group awkwardly places a hand near their hearts. Some closer than others.

COUNSELLOR JUDE (CONT'D)  
When they say you are heartbroken you really are. We hold so much in our chest... hurt and anxiety. We need to breathe it out.

She exhales deeply.

COUNSELLOR JUDE (CONT'D)  
Exercise will help us do this. But we can't push these feelings down we also need to find ways to feel: write, paint, talk to someone.

VALERIE  
No one wants to hear how I feel. They wanted to know the details of his death but not about me.

PAUL  
I know. Why does everyone keep asking "how"?  
(MORE)



PAUL (CONT'D)

My mom died of cancer no one asks but "how" - did she stop breathing or did her heart stop?

(pause)

Cancer. That's all I have to say. But with Dad, suicide, is never a good enough answer.

(pause)

He was 80. I didn't think old people did that? After Mom died it was rough. They'd been married 60 years. But Dad was tough as nails. Never seen him cry. He drove his car to the beach, walked in the ocean, and drowned. Fuck me. Why didn't I see how depressed he was?

Nadia begins to cry.

NADIA CROP TOP GIRL

I should have known. I was home. He hung himself with a belt, in his room, from a four foot window sill. How is that even possible?

As Nadia talks Em crumples her guilt paper into a fist.

NADIA CROP TOP GIRL (CONT'D)

He was my little brother and only 15. He was a brilliant violinist, loved music but our parents convinced him to study business. We talked. He was upset. I didn't think it was a big deal. I was watching TV. TV! I was his big sister. I should have known.

In the silence that follows Em gets up to leave.

COUNSELLOR JUDE

Emma? Are you okay.

EM

I just... where's the bathroom?

40

**INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT**

A fluorescent light flickers and sends shadows across the pale blue concrete hallway. Em looks at the women's washroom sign, turns the opposite direction and bolts out the front door.

41        **EXT. STREET - NIGHT**

A street lamp sends halos of light into the sky. Em walks quicker and quicker until she is at an awkward run her purse flailing at her side.

She stops out of breath, hyperventilating, shakes it off, and pulls herself together.

42        **INT. DEE DEE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

Em enters and tries to cover how unsettled she is with a fake smile.

Aiden quietly exits and closes the door to Dee Dee's bedroom as he shares a look with Dee Dee.

EM

People in group are really struggling. One person has been going for two years. It was good to go just to know that I'm okay.

DEE DEE

Is that what the counsellor said?

EM

No, but. I didn't lose a child. It's different for me. And look.

Em pulls a crumpled blue paper from her bag.

EM (CONT'D)

I got some pamphlets and a list of books to read. I'm good.

Dee Dee is not convinced.

EM (CONT'D)

It's been a year. I need a job, not therapy. I'm on it.

43        **INT. DEE DEE'S LIVING ROOM - MORNING - DAYS LATER**

Em dressed all in black tries to pull herself together for a job interview. Dee Dee pulls hair and crumbs off Em's jacket. Aiden sips coffee.

AIDEN

I still don't understand what this company is. A dot-com?

Dee Dee shoots him a look.

AIDEN (CONT'D)  
I'm sure it's cool.  
(air punctuating)  
It's got a dot!

Dee Dee shakes her head.

EM  
As long as they hire me to  
(air quotes)  
"...design and maintain their  
website... in a timely manner."  
I'm happy.

AIDEN  
You'll kill it.

Dee Dee flinches. Bad choice of words. Em catches her breath.

DEE DEE  
You got it.

Aiden gives a thumbs up. And Em leaves the apartment.

Dee Dee tosses a wet towel at Aiden.

DEE DEE (CONT'D)  
Christ Aiden!

AIDEN  
What? I'm being encouraging. She's  
got a job interview! She's left the  
couch. She's left the couch!

Aiden suddenly realizes.

AIDEN (CONT'D)  
When do you have to be at work?

DEE DEE  
I have to leave in 10 minutes.

AIDEN  
Perfect.

He flicks the towel at her ass. She grabs it and pulls him to her.

DEE DEE  
Anywhere but that couch.

AIDEN

Maybe when she leaves she can take  
it with her?

Aiden pulls Dee Dee onto the kitchen counter and she bangs  
her head on the cupboard as a pan falls into the sink. They  
look at each other. Sexy time is not happening here.

DEE DEE

Bedroom.

AIDEN

Bedroom

44

**INT. BUS - MORNING**

Em sits on the edge of her seat somewhere between lost in  
thought, deep sadness, and crushing anxiety. A MAN, 50s in a  
double breasted power suit of unfortunate 1990s colour sits  
across from her trying to get her attention.

MAN

Someone as pretty as you should be  
smiling.

EM

(not fully hearing)  
What?

MAN

Smile?

Oh no he didn't? Em breathes, stares at him.

EM

My boyfriend died and I'm really  
fucking sad. But if it would make  
you feel better I'll smile.

She doesn't say this. But thinks it and gives the man a huge  
psychotic grin. He backs off while everyone else stares.

MAN

(under his breath)  
Bitch.

Em stands up and psycho-stares at each and every person then  
exits the bus.

Her fists clenched, eyes watering, she desperately tries to  
pull her shit together.

45       **EXT. DOWNTOWN SIDE WALK - DAY**

Em looks at the dot-com neon sign YULOO, on a cool, renovated warehouse.

She takes a huge Counsellor Jude breath and exhales unnaturally like spitting up water.

                          EM  
                  You got this?

46       **INT. YULOO OFFICE - DAY**

An open concept office. Brick walls, steel beams exposed in the ceiling and rows of 20-something nerds (1998 nerds, before it was cool) sit in front of 1998 turquoise iMacG3s.

A hip 20-something female receptionist dressed like a corporate Spice Girl picks up her phone.

                          RECEPTIONIST  
                  Emma BA-KI-RTZ-IS is here.  
                  (pause)  
                  Okay.

She hangs up.

                          RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)  
                  Go in.

Em is confused. She is "in" the office. There's only one big office.

The receptionist gestures - in - in.

Em walks through the office still confused.

In the far corner TERRY YANG, 20s, waves at Em to come.

                          YANG  
                  Hey, you must be Emma.

Em looks at the sea of young men.

                          EM  
                  Ya, no other Emma's probably here.

The joke is lost on Yang.

                          YANG  
                  Sit, sit.

Em looks around and sees a bean bag chair. Yang plops down on a bag.

Em slowly squats down in her skirt until she falls sideways keeping her knees together.

YANG (CONT'D)  
So, your portfolio is cool.

EM  
Thanks.

YANG  
But what have you been doing the last year?

Em is prepared; sort of.

EM  
I've been traveling.

YANG  
Cool. Where?

Em's not prepared,

EM  
Ah... Ka--t--man-du?

Long pause.

YANG  
Cool. So Em. Tell me about design.

EM  
I'm passionate about colour and typography. It should be simple and functional. But it's really about your brand. I'd want to design a website that builds trust and guides your visitors to take action.

Yang tosses a Nerf basketball into a net over Em's head.

YANG  
Boo-ya!

Em unsure.

YANG (CONT'D)  
That's exactly what we need. We want to build synergy and scale.  
(MORE)

YANG (CONT'D)

We need people to know who we are,  
what we do. What we're going to do.  
How can people find us? It's not  
like you can just type our name in  
a computer.

If only they knew Google was launching that year.

47

**INT. DEE DEE'S KITCHEN - MORNING - TWO WEEKS LATER**

Emma gets ready for work. She pulls on a shabby blazer and  
ties back her wet hair.

EM

I still can't believe they hired  
me.

DEE DEE

How's your first week been.  
Exciting? Hard?

EM

I don't know. It's good to be busy.

EM (CONT'D)

I've noticed that our receptionist  
at work is always so put  
together... heels, make-up, hair.  
I've decided to make an effort.

Dee and Aiden exchange a look over their coffee cups.

EM (CONT'D)

I've been having a shower every  
morning.

DEE DEE

Well, that's great Em, but that's  
not fashion. It's just basic  
hygiene.

Aiden spits up his coffee. Then recovers.

AIDEN

Which is great. Guys... employers  
love that.

(MORE)

AIDEN (CONT'D)  
Freshly washed hair... soap..

Dee shoots him the stop while you're ahead look.

Emma oblivious. Shoulders back, heads out to work.

After she leaves Dee Dee and Aiden share a moment.

AIDEN (CONT'D)  
She's showering. Maybe it's time.  
For the big messy bird to leave the  
nest.

He motions pushing Em out and him in.

Dee Dee looks to the door her sister just left. Worried but hopeful for her sister and for her life with Aiden to start.

48 **EXT. DOWNTOWN SIDEWALK - NIGHT**

Em leaves the YULOO office. Yang and a few of his INTERNET NERD acolytes hang at the entrance pounding back caffeinated sodas.

YANG  
Working late again?

EM  
Not as late as you. I know you're  
going back in.

YANG  
This is my Kat-man-du.

He awkwardly winks.

YANG (CONT'D)  
Go, go have fun.

The sidewalk is empty but Em's view is partially obscured by her NERDS and half sees a man who walks by. His profile and the BLUE PLAID SHIRT make him a dead ringer for the photo of Hudson we've seen.

Em holds her breath. Anxiety 0 to 100 explodes, her heart races. She can't let her new boss and colleagues see her like this.

She flees down the steps and out of sight. Holding her breath.



When her body finally forces her to breathe she gasps and has to sit down on the curb.

49

**INT. SPIRITUAL BOOK STORE - NIGHT**

Thousands of books organized into sections with healing green signs: Buddhism, Consciousness, Waking and Dying, Health and Healing, Inspiration, Recovery and Self Help.

Em walks cautiously to the Grieving section, clutches the blue pamphlet from her last counselling session, and scans books. She randomly pulls books on grief and flips through the pages.

She's lost.

A long-skirted, barefoot, and beaded bookseller floats into the aisle all crystals and compassion.

BOOKSELLER

Can I help you?

EM

Where are your books on suicide?

BOOKSELLER

Let me show you.

Em follows her back to the Dying section.

The bookseller gestures at a row of books as if casting a spell.

BOOKSELLER (CONT'D)

Here you are.

Em takes a moment, grabs a book, then another, and another. Increasingly upset.

EM

These are all on doctor assisted suicide. Where are the books on what to do when someone kills themselves? Someone who's not old or ill?

BOOKSELLER

Oh, I, don't know. Maybe in Grieving.

The bookseller backs away, no longer so helpful. These feelings are messy.

EM  
I was just in Grieving.

BOOKSELLER  
Perhaps you should go back?

EM  
(Losing her shit)  
I'm not going back to Grieving!  
There were no suicide books there.  
Your store only has books on how to  
help people kill themselves.

Suddenly only the bookseller's flowery skirt is visible between the book stacks, as she escapes into Astrology, Tarot, Oracles & Divination.

Em drops all the books in a pile and stares at the various comforting hues of the covers of death books.

50      **INT. DEE DEE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

Em paces in the living room waving her blue list like a deflated life vest.

EM  
Seriously, even if they had any  
books on this list. I can't afford  
to buy them. I have no money. I owe  
you money.

Dee is about to say something.

EM (CONT'D)  
What, a waste, of time.

Dee is about to say something.

EM (CONT'D)  
Seriously.

Em tosses her blue list of suicide books into her corner of lost and forgotten things.

51      **INT. DEE DEE'S LIVING ROOM - NEXT DAY**

Em arrives home from work. Tosses her backpack on the floor and sees a library book, with her crumpled blue list tucked in the cover page, sitting on her couch-bed.

She picks it up, reads, and fights back a cry.

Dee Dee walks in slowly from her bedroom.

DEE DEE  
I went to the library. That's the  
only book they had. Available.  
There are two others on hold. I  
circled them.

EM  
Thanks.

Em hugs the book to her chest.

DEE DEE  
I just wanted...

EM  
I know.

DEE DEE  
And maybe think about going back to  
group? Or start swimming again?

EM  
Too busy. New job. Don't want  
anyone there to think I'm a mess.  
Moving on.

She looks at the book. Deflecting.

EM (CONT'D)  
I'll read this. Promise.

52      **INT. DEE DEE'S LIVING ROOM - MORNING**

Em is dressed for work and shoves a few things into her  
backpack.

She grabs the grief book, then hesitates.

She looks at the bookshelf and grabs a copy of "The Joy of  
Cooking", removes the book jacket and covers her grief book  
with "Joy" before slipping it into her bag.

53      **INT. BUS - MORNING**

Em is on the bus reading "The Joy of Cooking".

Then stares out the window at the reflections of the city and  
book cover overlapping in the pouring rain. "Joy" barely  
visible through the rain.

**INT. AQUATIC CENTRE - NIGHT**

We hear the deep long exhale of air underwater and then gasps for breath.

We move over water, and see distorted swirls and splashes of aqua blue until the black line of a swim lane on the bottom of a pool becomes visible.

We finally see Em swimming.

She finishes her lap and is met in the adjoining lane by Steve.

STEVE

I thought you'd be way slower.

Em can't reply. She's gasping for air. She's clearly pushed through her lack of fitness.

A beautiful 20-year-old man pops up like a sleek otter next to Steve and puts his arm around him.

THEO

I'm Theo. And you must be Em.

Theo extends a handshake. Em grabs his hand but her eyes are on Steve. Steve blushes. Steve never blushes.

THEO (CONT'D)

Okay. See you in the shower.

Theo pops underwater again. And Em looks around puzzled.

Then a SPLASH as Theo hoists himself out of the water. His muscular swimmer arms, abs, and ass teeter on the ledge for a second more than needed before he stands on deck and grabs his towel.

Steve and Em both gape. Then laugh.

EM

Okay when did you and otter boy hook up?

STEVE

Six months ago.

EM

What? And I'm just finding out now?

STEVE

I haven't seen much of you. And...

EM  
What?

STEVE  
I didn't want to talk to you  
about...

EM  
About what? Having a boyfriend?

STEVE  
No, about being happy.

This lands hard on Em but she covers.

EM  
Are you happy?

STEVE  
Yes, I am.

EM  
Well you better hop out and join  
him.

Steve tries to pull himself out, stumbles, Em grabs his speedo ass and tries to push him up but he's too big. He falls back on top of her and they both crash into the water. Laughing.

STEVE  
I think I'll use the ladder.

Steve makes his way to the side of the pool.

STEVE (CONT'D)  
I'm really glad you're back.

Em takes off her bathing cap, smiles and then struggles with a weird emotional contortion on her face.

She plunges underwater to wash whatever that feeling was. Guilt?

55 **INT. GROUP COUNSELLING ROOM - NIGHT**

We see Em so close that we almost see tears... if Em cried.

EM  
But I was laughing? I can't be  
laughing.

COUNSELLOR JUDE  
I have an important question for  
you. Was it funny?

EM  
Yes.

COUNSELLOR JUDE  
Then there is no problem.  
If it wasn't funny and you were  
laughing that would be  
inappropriate.

We hear few muffled laughs around the room.

COUNSELLOR JUDE (CONT'D)  
Exactly.

And then we see our circle of despair with some familiar sad  
faces: Paul (tattoo guy), Nadia (crop top girl), Valerie (mom  
with scrunchy in hair) but Gary (crumpled suit guy) is gone.

COUNSELLOR JUDE (CONT'D)  
We are human, complicated, and have  
many emotions in a day even at the  
exact same time. You're allowed to  
feel them all.

EM  
I can't be happy - yet.

COUNSELLOR JUDE  
Do you have a time figured out when  
you can? I don't think it works  
that way. There are so many  
emotions when we grieve. People  
talk about the five stages of grief  
Denial, Anger, Bargaining,  
Depression, and Acceptance. But  
these aren't linear and not  
everyone even experiences these  
stages. Or you can bounce back and  
forth - Denial-Anger, Denial-Anger.

More awkward laughing.

COUNSELLOR JUDE (CONT'D)  
And more importantly, with suicide  
there are some big emotions that  
don't make that list... like guilt,  
or even relief. Yes, that's an  
uncomfortable one.

BARB, ageless 37 or 47, a natural beauty despite her obvious exhaustion, sighs deeply. She's new to Em but not to this group who has been attending regularly.

BARB

Most of you know I cared for my mother who was dying of cancer and my adult schizophrenic brother. When she died he killed himself. But then I was looking after my sister who was manic depressive and her two children. And she killed herself last month.

The room is dumbstruck. Holy fuck.

BARB (CONT'D)

I was so exhausted. I was glad it was all over. Then guilty. Now I don't know if I'm depressed or just tired all the time.

Em listens shellshocked, feeling similarly understood and yet not fully understanding.

VALERIE

I'll never get my son back. He was my only child. Most days I still can't get out of bed.

PAUL

There's no time for bullshit. I can't hang round no one who talks shit. But I ain't got many friends that stuck round. Maybe cause I'm angry all the time.

COUNSELLOR JUDE

How many of you have lost friends because of suicide? And how many actually want all of those friends back?

BARB

One friend asked me if my depression thing was temporary or permanent.

Muffled laughs around the room.

BARB (CONT'D)

I've thought of making new friends  
but I'm afraid once they hear all  
my shit they will be frightened  
away.

NADIA

I'm scared all the time. I can't  
sleep alone. When I stay at my  
parents I sleep with my mom. My dad  
left after...

Nadia looks down.

NADIA (CONT'D)

When I'm at my apartment.  
(long pause and looks at  
ground)  
I've been with lots of men. Just so  
I'm not alone.

Everyone looks to Em. She's the only one who hasn't shared.

EM

I tried to call his family. But  
their phone is disconnected. I  
wrote them but...  
(pause)

I can't sleep either. I watch TV  
all the time. I want to sleep. I  
just... hate waking up. For a  
second it's okay, just before I  
open my eyes, and then it all comes  
crashing down.

COUNSELLOR JUDE

What comes crashing down?

EM

All of it.

Counsellor Jude knows this is all she's going to get from Em.

COUNSELLOR JUDE

Okay. If you have a journal write  
more about what you are feeling  
right now. And if you don't journal  
find other ways to feel. Talk to  
someone.

Counsellor Jude quietly approaches Em.



COUNSELLOR JUDE (CONT'D)  
I'm glad to see you back in group  
Emma. You can't do this alone.

EM  
I know.

COUNSELLOR JUDE  
Do you? If you don't have his  
family? Do you have your family? Do  
you have someone?

EM  
Sure, my family. My sister.

COUNSELLOR JUDE  
And do you share with them?

EM  
(Deflects)  
Where's Gary?

COUNSELLOR JUDE  
I don't know, Emma.

Em grabs her bag and leaves.

She passes Paul at the exit.

PAUL  
Glad to see you back. You always  
seemed so over it. Guess you're  
fucked up too?

EM  
I guess I am.

56 **INT. DEE DEE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

Em pushes the TV into Dee Dee's room while Dee Dee watches  
confused but hopeful.

EM  
I thought Aiden could watch soccer.  
He's here all the time and...

DEE DEE  
You sure.

EM  
I'm at work all the time now.

DEE DEE  
Is that good?

EM  
Yes, at group they said it was  
good. Back to work, back to normal.

Dee Dee looks skeptical.

EM (CONT'D)  
We share, talk, right?

DEE DEE  
Of course. We're family.

Em silently plugs in the TV.

EM  
There you go.

Dee Dee waits for Em to share more. She doesn't.

57

**INT. COUNSELLOR OFFICE - DAY**

We see Counsellor Jude in her office. Lots of purple cushions. A poster hangs on her wall "*The wound is the place where the light enters you.*" Rumi

COUNSELLOR JUDE  
So why do you think she asked you  
that?

A long pause but Counsellor Jude keeps eye contact with...  
DEE DEE who sits across from Counsellor Jude.

DEE DEE  
Because we don't. We don't talk  
about anything important.  
(pause)  
Does she share at group?

COUNSELLOR JUDE  
I can't discuss that Deidre. How  
can I help you?

DEE DEE  
I don't know how... what to say.  
She's always looked after me. She  
just... she says she's okay but she  
never leaves the couch.

COUNSELLOR JUDE  
What did Em like to do?

DEE DEE

She used to swim. We used to sail together. We haven't sailed in over a year. Since... the day she found out.

Dee Dee cries.

COUNSELLOR JUDE

When we are hurting we should be kind to ourselves but we often do the opposite. We attack ourselves. We even invite our inner shitty committee to help.

(pause)

This isn't something you can fix. You can just be there when she wants to talk. Be patient and kind. Be kind to yourself.

(pause)

If you and Emma aren't talking who do you have?

DEE DEE

My boyfriend Aiden.

COUNSELLOR JUDE

And does he talk?

DEE DEE

He never stops.

58 **DEE DEE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Aiden sits on the bed and watches a soccer match with a beer in one hand and the remote in the other.

His team is not doing well.

AIDEN

No, no no.....

When Dee Dee walks in he mutes it but keeps watching.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

How did it go?

DEE DEE

Thank you.

AIDEN

Okay?

Dee Dee puts a chair against the door, walks towards him and begins to take off her clothes.

Aiden watches the TV a little less.

DEE DEE  
Don't worry you can watch the game.  
I'll do all the work.

Dee Dee grabs the remote, turns up the volume and tosses it. She crawls onto his lap his hands still holding a beer.

AIDEN  
You're deadly Deidre.

We leave the room but hear shouts and groans from soccer fans on the TV.

59      **INT. DEE DEE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Dee Dee enters with a handful of mail and hands an envelope to Em cautiously.

Em looks at it painfully. If you look closely it says RETURN TO SENDER.

DEE DEE  
I didn't know you were in contact  
with them?

EM  
I'm not. I mean. I haven't been.  
Their phone was disconnected and I  
thought I'd try and write.

DEE DEE  
They returned it.

EM  
Maybe they moved.

DEE DEE  
It's weird though.

EM  
Maybe.

Em rips the letter into pieces and tosses in the trash.

DEE DEE  
What did you write them?

EM  
Nothing...nothing.  
(pause)  
I just thought...

DEE DEE  
You all lost him. Maybe it would  
have helped to have them to talk  
to. Not his mom... maybe Miguel?

EM  
Maybe. But they're not family.  
Never were.

60      **INT. DEE DEE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

The grey couch has been pushed against the wall squishing  
Em's belongings barely out of sight.

Two second hand tables are stacked next to each other with  
six mismatched chairs.

Dee Dee sets the tables with even more mismatched plates and  
cutlery.

Em is in the tiny kitchen which sits at the end of the living  
room. She is cooking and frazzled.

DEE DEE  
I said I can help.

EM  
No. I'm doing this. I owe everyone  
a meal... at least.

KNOCK at the door. Dee Dee opens to Aiden with his arms full  
of booze.

AIDEN  
I didn't know what to get since you  
are cooking a surprise.

He stacks bottles on the table.

AIDEN (CONT'D)  
So I have red, white, and beer.

Steve and Theo walk in the open door with bags.

STEVE  
We brought bread and dessert.

EM

I told you not to bring anything.

Dee Dee takes their offering.

DEE DEE

Thanks guys.

Em turns her back and opens the oven burning herself.

EM

Christ!

Dee Dee and Aiden look at the boys and wince.

Aiden opens the red wine and pours Dee Dee a large glass.

AIDEN

I know Dee Dee likes her red but  
what would you like?

STEVE

Beer.

THEO

Beer.

They look at each other and smile.

Aiden hands them a beer and cracks one for himself. They are  
all about to drink.

AIDEN

Wait. Wait.

He grabs a big glass and walks towards Em.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

White?

EM

(distracted)

No. No I'm good.

Aiden fills it to the brim, hands it to her, and turns to  
face everyone.

AIDEN

To Em and this wonderful mystery  
meal we are about to have.

Everyone drinks and Em chugs down half her glass. She turns  
to check on the food and Aiden re-fills her glass.

Em grabs a casserole dish from the oven and walks it to the table.

EM  
Sit, sit.

They all sit down and there is one empty chair.

THEO  
Who are we waiting for?

Steve gives him a "we talked about this" look.

EM  
Our dad. He's not coming. Let's start.  
(pause)  
It's moussaka.

STEVE  
Is this vegetarian?

EM  
No. Lots of meat.

Steve gives her a look.

EM (CONT'D)  
I eat meat now.

DEE DEE  
Our mom used to cook it.

EM  
I made it for Hudson and he thought I was a great cook. But it's the only thing I know how to cook.

Aiden refills Em's glass.

EM (CONT'D)  
But that same night he played his guitar and he only knew one song.  
(pause)  
He thought he landed Greek Martha Stewart and I thought I was with a Latino Bon Jovi.

Em empties her glass.

There is an awkward silence as everyone watches her share - anything about Hudson - for the first time.

THEO

This is awesome.

Theo shovels forks of casserole into his mouth.

STEVE

Ya, this is great Em. Thanks.

EM

No, thanks to you guys. For being here. I know it hasn't, I haven't been easy. But I want you to know that I'm moving on.

Aiden and Dee Dee share a hopeful look.

EM (CONT'D)

I have a job, paid you back, almost, and now I can look for a place and who knows...

THEO

Maybe you can find love again.

Everyone cringes except Theo. So sincere.

Em fills her glass with more wine and takes a long sip.

EM

Ya, I'm a catch. I live on my sister's couch. And can you imagine that new couple conversation? "So why did you and your last boyfriend break up? Oh, we didn't break up, he killed himself?"

(rambling drunk)

It's like virginity?

Everyone confused but transfixed.

EM (CONT'D)

You just want to lose it. I need to lose my widow-cherry. Just have sex with someone... so when someone asks about my ex... it won't be my dead-ex but a rando-ex, ex.

She empties the bottle into her glass. No one else is drinking white.

THEO

I think it's worth waiting. If it's the right person they won't care about your past.



Everyone cringes - again. While Theo hugs Steve oblivious.

Em looks across the table at two couples in love and feels very alone.

61        **INT. DEE DEE'S LIVING ROOM - MORNING**

Unwashed dishes, empty wine bottles on the table, and the couch still pushed against the wall.

Aiden tip-toes over to the couch with two coffees in his hand.

He looks over the back and sees Em crashed and half dressed.

He puts down one cup to gently pull a blanket over her.

62        **INT. DEE DEE'S BEDROOM - MORNING**

Aiden enters with coffee and hands one to Dee Dee.

AIDEN

She's in a 'heap'. It's a good thing she normally eats her grief.

DEE DEE

Aiden?!

AIDEN

What? She can't hold her drink. Just like you. It's not a bad thing you don't drink, especially when you work in a bar.

DEE DEE

What, you'd rather I drank my tips?

AIDEN

No, we're saving our money.

DEE DEE

Oh are we? I thought you were just saving by eating here all the time.

AIDEN

I earn my keep.

He makes a bad sexy move.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Do you think I can start breakfast? I'm starving.

**DEE DEE'S LIVING ROOM - LATE MORNING**

Dee Dee is cleaning the kitchen while Aiden cooks breakfast.

Em is half hidden from the couch but rummaging through her piles.

DEE DEE

You sure you don't want breakfast.

EM

No, coffee is good. I'm gonna swim off this hangover.

AIDEN

Do you want us to help move your couch and stuff back?

Em pops her head up over the couch.

EM

Nah. It gives you more room this way.

Em leaves the apartment with a coffee in hand, wearing ripped sweats, a now filthy old BLUE SWEATER with massive holes and sunglasses. She is grungy, not grunge.

AIDEN

Jezus she's 'hanging like a sign'. Do you think she'll remember that she said she was moving out?

DEE DEE

I don't know but I can't ask her.

AIDEN

Why not? Come on. I'd like to move in full time. And leave your bedroom... naked.

DEE DEE

I want that too.

(quizzical)

I think.

(pause)

But..I can't kick her out until she's ready. She's back at group but... I don't know. Does she seem better? It's just, she never says anything.

AIDEN

Well neither do you. So how will you know when that is?

DEE DEE

I say stuff.

AIDEN

You say plenty of stuff. But not from your heart, luv.

Dee Dee's not going to go there.

DEE DEE

Look, she didn't leave me so I can't leave her. And it's coming up to the anniversary.

AIDEN

Exactly almost two years Deidre! We were going to move in together two years ago. Jesus. Guilt is the gift that keeps on giving.

DEE DEE

What does that mean?

AIDEN

She looked after you. Now you looked after her. It's time.

DEE DEE

I can't.

AIDEN

Maybe I should spend some time back at my place.

DEE DEE

It's okay. You can stay here.

AIDEN

No, Dee. It's not okay.

64

**EXT. AQUATIC CENTRE - DAY**

Em is a hangover mess when she bumps into Aunt Marg, in her matching Tommy Hilfiger sweatsuit who has just said good-bye to an equally sporty friend.

MARGARET

Emma. I haven't seen you in ages.  
You never return my calls. Just  
like your dad.

EM

I've been busy.

MARGARET

I know. Between work and the family  
I'm lucky to get in my Aquacize.

She waves to a few more women from her class.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

We'll you don't know what it's  
like. You're single. Are you  
seeing anyone?

EM

Of course not.

MARGARET

Oh I didn't know you were still so  
upset. It's not like you were  
married.

Em has no words. Margaret is oblivious.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

I mean Gareth and I have been  
together for 30 years... even your  
dad was with your mom for...what?  
Ten years?

EM

Thirteen.

MARGARET

Maybe eleven.

EM

Thirteen.

(angry)

They were together thirteen years.  
I was twelve when...

MARGARET

Oh that's right. Shame he never  
married. But he had you girls.  
Let's have coffee sometime. Gotta  
run.

And off she goes.

**EXT. AQUATIC CENTRE - DAY**

Em completes the hangover walk of shame and meets Steve at the entrance. A few other swimmers greet them enthusiastically and then enter without them.

EM

Not like I was married? What the fuck does that mean?

Steve is about to say something.

EM (CONT'D)

Is that what people think? That for some reason if you're married it counts. But if you live with someone, share a bed, a life, it doesn't hurt so much. A piece of paper makes you a widow. Without it what? Nothing?

STEVE

Some people think that.

EM

That's not helpful.

STEVE

Sorry. It's just... lots of people think my relationship doesn't count. My family doesn't even accept me, let alone Theo. I can't even get married Em. Don't have Margs in your life

EM

I know, I know... it'd just be easier if I could wear black for two years. And then I'd be left alone.

STEVE

You do wear black all the time.

EM

Okay, a black veil, like those old Sicilian women.

STEVE

Sure. I'd support you but not sure that's going to help. And do you want people to recognize you as a widow or to be left alone?

EM  
I don't know. Both. And if I'm not  
a widow. What am I?

STEVE  
(frustrated)  
I don't know Em. Sad? Maybe angry?

Em is stunned. The truth hurts. She snaps back.

EM  
You don't seriously want to marry  
Theo? If you could.

STEVE  
Why not?

EM  
Come on. Really?

STEVE  
Why wouldn't I marry him? Besides,  
we are living together and isn't  
that the same thing?  
(snap)  
You coming to practice?

EM  
(embarrassed/angry/hurt)  
No, not today.

Steve watches her walk away.

Theo joins him on the steps, looks at Em, and puts a hand on  
his shoulder. His ersatz family is there for him. Em too if  
she'd let them.

66 **INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY**

A mediocre, midsize grocery store with questionable veggies  
and bad fluorescent lighting. It's sad.

Em walks down an aisle and pushes a cart like it was an ice  
berg (Celine Dion's "My Heart will Go on" 1997 plays). This  
is purgatory.

She tosses chips, cheezies, chips, chocolates, cupcakes,  
pepperoni sticks... all the chemical food groups you can't  
pronounce into her cart.

Em arrives at the checkout line and piles junk food onto the  
counter.

The clerk slowly presses the conveyor belt button so each of the items slowly drift toward her in sync with the music.

CLERK

You having a party?

EM

What?

The clerk starts packing a bag.

CLERK

A party?

Em silently gives her \$40, grabs the bag, and walks away with out her change.

67 **EXT. GROCERY STORE - DAY**

Em rips open a chip bag and shoves a handful in her mouth.

Every time someone leaves the store and the automatic doors open we hear Celine in the distance.

Em stares at nothing.

Gary (from her first counselling session) exits the LIQUOR STORE next door with a large brown paper bag. He looks like this has become a daily trip.

They see each other.

Em nods, a chip falls from her face to the ground, and they retreat silently.

68 **INT. DEE DEE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

**MONTAGE**

Em pulls the TV from Dee Dee's room.

Em drags her couch away from the wall but just far enough to see the TV.

Em sits in front of the television, eats and flicks the remote control.

She plows through bags of chips and chocolate.

Finally stops, gathers the half eaten carnage and tosses it into the garbage can.

Walks away. Walks back. Pulls out the cupcakes still in plastic, pulls one out and takes a bite, tosses it back in the garbage.

Sits in front of the TV. The blue wash of channels washes over her in the dark.

**BACK TO SCENE**

69

**INT. DEE DEE'S LIVING ROOM - MORNING (AUGUST 1999 "ALMOST" TWO YEARS LATER)**

Em's asleep on the couch, still dressed. The TV is still on.

Dee Dee turns off the TV and gives Em a gentle nudge.

Em bolts upright in a panic.

EM

What? What's wrong?

DEE DEE

Nothing. Well you're going to be late for work.

Em is silent. No eye contact.

DEE DEE (CONT'D)

I'll make coffee and you can jump in the shower.

EM

I'm going to take a mental health day.

DEE DEE

I don't think that's a thing. Let me make coffee.

Dee Dee goes to the kitchen. She sees the junk food carnage in the trash.

Em grabs a blanket and rolls over. She's not going anywhere.

Dee Dee reins in her anxiety. Don't panic. She's not going down that TV couch path again.

DEE DEE (CONT'D)

Why don't I call in sick and we can both play hooky and go sailing?

Em turns to Dee Dee with a thousand mile stare.



EM

I'm never sailing again.

She turns on the television.

OS NEWS ANCHOR (O.S.)

As we near the two year anniversary of the death of Diana Princess of Wales, there is continued pressure for a public inquest.

(pause)

While the public blames paparazzi, the father of Dodi Fayed, Mohamed Al-Fayed, continues to claim the crash was the result of a conspiracy orchestrated by the royal family.

Dee Dee watches from the kitchen

EM

Christ. A conspiracy. Seriously? Why? Why? Everyone wants to know why. It's been two years and it's still all over the television. It wasn't a conspiracy. She's dead because she wasn't wearing her seatbelt and her driver was drunk. People want drama. Isn't it enough that she's dead?

DEE DEE

I know Hudson's death is coming up. Did you want to do anything?

EM

What's the point? I don't need an inquest. No funeral. It's over. Done.

(gestures at the TV)

Two years ago.

DEE DEE

And Hudson's not dead because of you or anything you did or didn't do. He's dead because he was depressed.

EM

You don't think I know that? I lived with him. I know. Did you know?

DEE DEE  
That's not fair. I'm trying to help.

EM  
You're a counsellor now?

DEE DEE  
I'm your sister.

EM  
Stick to waitressing.

Dee Dee tries to escape the fight and trips over Em's shit.

DEE DEE  
Shit!

She tosses it into the corner.

DEE DEE (CONT'D)  
Can you at least keep your shit on this side of the room so we have a path.  
(under her breath)  
Get your shit together.

EM  
What?

DEE DEE  
Nothing.

EM  
No you said "Get your shit together" What does that mean?

DEE DEE  
Okay you wanna go there. Look at you. You went to one or two meetings and then you stopped.

EM  
It just makes it worse. Brings up shit that I've dealt with already. I'm moving on. I have a job. A real job.

DEE DEE  
Really. You're moving on?  
(gestures at couch)  
Look how you are living.

EM  
What? You want me to move out?

DEE DEE  
Why not? You're moving on.  
Everything is great. Right?

EM  
I'll be gone by the end of the  
month.

DEE DEE  
Good. And take that disgusting  
couch with you.

70

**INT. MR. BAKIRTZIS LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

An open living room in a modest bungalow. Time has stood still the year his wife died 1981. The same year Lady Di married her prince.

Em sits on a rarely used couch covered with a crochet blanket and her dad brings her a cup of tea in a Lady Di commemorative wedding mug.

EM  
I can't believe you still have  
these.

Mr. B sits in his Lazy Boy and sips his tea.

EM (CONT'D)  
Remember she got us up at 2:00am to  
watch the wedding? A school day. We  
went to school half asleep with  
cucumber sandwiches. What kid likes  
cucumber?

Em sips her tea and looks at the royal couple and her dad.

EM (CONT'D)  
Not really happily every after.

Mr. B surveys his living room; his life.

MR.B  
You know you can stay as long as  
you like. Go through your stuff in  
your old room.

EM  
I'm only here for a couple of  
weeks. Til I find a place.

MR. B  
(almost hopeful)  
Still, if you need to.

EM  
Thanks. I'm gonna head.

Em gets up and heads to her room.

71 **INT. EMMA & DEIDRE'S OLD ROOM - NIGHT**

Two single beds in a small room with posters of Michael J. Fox and Bon Jovi - the blended past of tween to teen.

Em crawls onto her old bed, grabs a Garfield stuffed toy and hugs it.

How did she get here?

72 **INT. MR. BAKIRTZIS LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Mr. B makes breakfast.

Em starts to clear the unused kitchen table of papers and books but Mr. B walks their plates out to the living room and turns on the news. Em follows.

She eats awkwardly off her plate on her lap. While her dad uses a strategic TV Tray near his lazy boy.

MR. B  
Oh sorry. I'm so used to.

He gets up and awkwardly reassembles his TV Tray for her.

EM  
I'm fine.

MR. B  
(flustered)  
No, no I'm sorry. We should have used the table.

Em puts her plate on the tray and eats.

EM  
This is great.

Mr. B returns to his chair and awkwardly eats off his lap.

EM (CONT'D)

Dad.

(pause)

Are you happy here?

Mr. B puts his plate down and takes a long moment.

MR. B

It hasn't all been unhappy... but I haven't been happy either.

They both eat and watch TV.

73

**INT. DEE DEE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY**

The grey couch of grief is piled high with boxes and Em is stuffing random shit into garbage bags.

Dee Dee packs a few things up in the kitchen.

The sister silence is epic.

Aiden carries a box out the door and Steve grabs some bags.

STEVE

Christ. How long has it been like this?

AIDEN

Last few weeks.

(pause)

Dee Dee's been crashing at my place just in case Em came back. She's been at her dad's.

STEVE

Harsh. To stay at your place.

AIDEN

Hey?

STEVE

Your place is kinda...

AIDEN

A shite hole? Ya it is but it was meant to be temporary. Like a porta potty.

Theo runs down the stairs with two boxes. He passes the men, and puts the boxes into the U-haul. Then bounds back up the stairs.

They both look at each other. Exhausted by his energy.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Really?!

Steve smiles and shrugs.

STEVE

I've never seen them like this.

AIDEN

I know. With my brothers we just beat the crap out of each other, then go for a pint and hug it out.

STEVE

Do you need a hug?

Steve leans in for a one arm bro-hug and Aiden makes it real.

Theo is already back down the stairs, puts down his new box and joins the hug.

Dee Dee is close behind but interrupts with a bag. And shakes her head.

DEE DEE

Dudes?

74

**INT. EMMA'S NEW APT - DAY**

Steve and Aiden haul the crap GREY COUCH through a narrow door and into a tiny living room.

They collapse onto the old springs of the pillowless couch. OUCH.

AIDEN

I am not doing this again.

STEVE

Well it's a good thing your move into Dee Dee's will be a backpack and a six-pack.

Aiden pulls up his shirt and pulls in his stomach.

STEVE (CONT'D)

Six pack of.. beer.

AIDEN

A perfect move.

Em arrives with the couch pillows, drops them on the floor, and turns to retrieve more stuff.

The boys take their cue and get back to work. Steve lingers a moment.

EM  
It's nice of Theo to help.

STEVE  
I know.

EM  
He's a good guy. A keeper. I'm...

STEVE  
I know.

Steve hugs Em and she pulls away quickly.

EM  
We have lots of work still.

75 **INT. EMMA'S NEW APT - LATER**

Em is sitting on the floor. Alone.

Aiden puts a box down with old albums and some of Hudson's things. (Same box we saw when we first saw Em move out of Hudson & her place).

AIDEN  
That was the last of the stuff that was in storage. I saved a few things.

Em starts to pull out some records and photos. She's lost.

AIDEN (CONT'D)  
Fuck him for putting you through this.

Em looks up more dazed than upset.

EM  
What? No. This is good. I'm getting my life back.

AIDEN  
Do you want us to stay? Have a cheeky brew?

EM  
What?

AIDEN  
A tea. Or maybe a beer?

EM  
No. No you go. I need to unpack and  
you need to move in with my sister.  
Sorry I was there for so long.

Aiden is crushed. Guilt really is the gift that keeps on giving.

We leave Em sitting on her crap couch in her new apartment. Alone.

76 **INT. DEE DEE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY**

The living room is empty of the couch of grief, music blares and Dee Dee is angry cleaning the now expansive living room

Aiden watches from the doorway until she notices, stops and turns down the music.

DEE DEE  
Is she okay?

AIDEN  
No. And neither are you. You need  
to make it right.

DEE DEE  
Me?

She tries to hang onto the anger but the facade cracks and she starts to tear up.

AIDEN  
Yes. You. You need to be a love  
warrior.

Dee Dee gives him a "you weirdo" look. And he put his hands on his hips like a superhero.

AIDEN (CONT'D)  
Come on?

He grabs her and makes her put her hands on her hips. She struggles then frees herself.



DEE DEE

Oh my God Aiden. What the hell am I supposed to do?

AIDEN

Be brave. Figure it out. And for Christ's sake give her a proper hug.

He pulls her in for a long hug until she's squirming uncomfortably and then he doubles down.

77

**INT. EMMA'S NEW APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

There is no furniture except the couch. Em sits on the floor.

She has emptied boxes but nothing has been put properly away. It's a messy, emotional, autopsy all over the floor.

Em pulls out the phone and answering machine from the box.

She searches frantically for the plug. Tosses shit on the floor.

Finds the right cord, plugs into the machine then looks for an outlet.

In the far corner there is one. She walks the plank towards it not sure if she can jump.

She kneels on the floor, plugs in the machine and we hear a whirl and then the answer message. It's her and a male voice. It's Hudson.

EM (V.O.)

Hello! You've reached Em and..

HUDSON (V.O.)

Hudson.

EM (V.O.)

We're not here now. Leave a message.

HUDSON (V.O.)

We're not here now. Leave a message.

Em almost smiles. Looks down to see the red message light blinking.

She reaches out, holds her breath and presses the message button. She has jumped into the abyss.

We hear just the beginning of the message.

HUDSON  
(panicked)  
Em. Are you there? Pick-up...

Em slams the stop button. Gasps for air and tears begin.

We don't hear the whole message. We just see Em listening to it over, and over.

She's on her knees - two years of grief released. Finally there are tears. Lots of them.

We hear the whirl of the rewind button.

78

**INT. GROUP COUNSELLING ROOM - NIGHT**

We see Em surrounded by the group: Paul (tattoo guy), Nadia (crop top girl), Valerie (mom with scrunchy in hair) and Barb (triple suicide survivor).

They are all sitting a little closer.

EM  
I had such a great day sailing. I  
I was happy. I felt free. I could  
breathe. I saw the message but  
didn't listen to it. I knew it was  
him. It was getting so hard. It  
was always so hard. I didn't want  
to deal with him. I didn't listen  
to the message until after... He  
begged me to pick-up. He was having  
another hard day. I didn't...

Em tries to hold in a messy snot cry. It just explodes more awkwardly. Years of grief, her mom, Hudson... have now been opened up.

EM (CONT'D)  
I didn't know it could hurt so  
much!

PAUL  
Welcome to the human race.

Counsellor Jude gives him a look. Kind but firm.

BARB  
I didn't know it could hurt so much  
either. And yes...  
(MORE)

BARB (CONT'D)

(looks at Paul)

It feels like I properly joined the human race, everyone who has suffered. All this pain. I feel like I am more open and compassionate but some days, closed and heartless.

VALERIE

What if your heart is broken forever?

COUNSELLOR JUDE

Maybe the brokenness makes us all more open and connected like Barb says. Or closed and alone. It's a choice.

That lands like a log on a rocky shore. No more sharing from the group.

COUNSELLOR JUDE (CONT'D)

I want you all to think about the loved one who died. What would they have thought about their death?

PAUL

It was courageous. Sorry I hurt you.

NADIA

I can't fight this anymore. I'm scared.

EM

I'm a failure. I'm just like my dad.

COUNSELLOR JUDE

Why just like his dad?

EM

His dad killed himself. Hudson said he never would because he knew how much it hurt him and others.

COUNSELLOR JUDE

Once someone in the family dies by suicide it increases the risk of other family members. It suddenly opens this up as an option. I know some of you may feel this way. Please talk to me or someone. Doesn't need to be here.

Another log drops on the shore of grief.

COUNSELLOR JUDE (CONT'D)

Okay what would they say to you now? Right now, if they saw you here.

PAUL

Don't be such an asshole.

A much needed laugh for the group.

VALERIE

Don't be sad forever.

BARB

I wish they'd say thank you. But...maybe... they'd say you're free now.

NADIA

Play music. He'd want me to play music.

EM

I don't know?

The group all stares.

EM (CONT'D)

I hope he'd forgive me.

COUNSELLOR JUDE

I think we all need to forgive ourselves. We are not the reason they killed themselves.

(pause)

We also have to love ourselves and let love into our lives again. Don't shut it out. Love heals the loss of a loved one.

Everyone drags their folding chairs against the wall. Exhausted from the sharing.

Paul stacks his next to Em.

PAUL

I don't know about the rest of those fuckers but I think we're gonna be okay.

He punches her in the shoulder. And Em punches him back.

79       **EXT. STREET - NIGHT**

Em walks at night. She rubs her shoulder and smiles.

80       **EXT. EMMA'S NEW APARTMENT - NIGHT**

Dee Dee sits outside Em's front door in the dark.

                  DEE DEE

          Hey..

Em jumps with a start.

                  EM

          Christ.

                  DEE DEE

          Sorry. I don't have keys.

Em moves past her sister and opens the door.

81       **INT. EMMA'S NEW APARTMENT - NIGHT**

The place is a disaster. Dee Dee is shocked.

                  EM

          It's not as bad as it looks.

Dee Dee looks at her.

                  EM (CONT'D)

          Okay. It's bad. But it's going to  
          get better.

Em drops her bag like an anchor and sinks into the  
uncomfortable couch. She nods for Dee Dee to join her.

Dee Dee sits on the opposite end. They face each other  
tentatively as if in a rocky row boat.

                  DEE DEE

          I'm sorry.

                  EM

          It's okay.

                  DEE DEE

          No, it's not. I shouldn't have  
          kicked you out.

EM

No, I was a lot and I needed to be on my own. Alone.

DEE DEE

Stop making this easy for me. I need to tell you how much I miss you and how much I need you.

(courage)

I love you. And I don't want you to be on your own. I don't want us to be like Dad.

EM

I don't want that either. Did we give up on him?

(pause)

Thanks for not giving up on me. I was such a dick. I'm so, so sorry. You are the most important relationship in my life.

(long pause )

I love you.

They move awkwardly for a hug and springs poke them. They stop.

EM (CONT'D)

I hate this fucking couch!

82

**EXT. EMMA'S NEW APT - NIGHT**

Dee and Em push the couch through the front door. Dee Dee gets whacked and squished.

DEE DEE

Ow! For Christ sake.

Dee Dee tears up. Yes, it hurt but so much more was welling up.

EM

Oh my god. Sorry.

Em now starts to tear up.

Dee Dee feels bad. They are both crying now.

DEE DEE

I'm fine. Just lift your side.

Em hauls her end up and puts them both off balance. They almost fall down the stairs.

DEE DEE (CONT'D)

Jezuz.

Dee Dee starts to laugh, then Em and the two of them stagger down the stairs and to the curb. Where they drop the dead weight.

They both collapse on the couch practically on top of each other. And Em hugs her sister and Dee Dee hugs back - properly.

DEE DEE (CONT'D)

We don't do this.

EM

Maybe we should start.

83 **INT. DEE DEE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Aiden's watching TV when Dee Dee walks in. He mutes it.

AIDEN

So?

DEE DEE

We're good.

AIDEN

What does that mean?

Dee Dee makes her love warrior stance.

Aiden is so proud.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Were you brave luv?

Dee Dee nods her head and starts to cry. Tears of joy and relief.

Aiden jumps off the bed and sweeps her into a hug.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

Doesn't it feel great?

Dee Dee cries more.

DEE DEE

Yesss.

Aiden starts to tear up too. They hug for a while and until... Dee Dee slows her tears to a sniffle.

Aiden releases the hug enough to look at the soccer game on TV.

DEE DEE (CONT'D)  
You know we have the whole apartment now so I think the TV can go back into the living room.

AIDEN  
Don't make me cry.

85      **EXT. EMMA'S NEW APT - DAY**

Em's got a coffee in one hand and scarfs down a muffin.

Dee Dee with Aiden joins her on the front steps. Aiden beams like a proud parent.

EM  
Thanks for breakfast.

DEE DEE  
Not sure you had any food in your fridge.

Aiden laughs a little too hard.

Dee Dee checks him with a look.

Aiden one-arm hugs the sisters. One on either side of him.

Em awkwardly tries not to spill her coffee.

EM  
Okay. I gotta go. Swim practice.

Em walks away and Dee Dee and Aiden watch after her, hopeful.

86      **EXT. AQUATIC CENTRE - DAY**

Em is heading in as she bumps into Margaret who has her head turned walking and talking to another aquacizer.

MARGARET  
Oh? Emma.

No apology. It's a Mexican stand off.

Em shakes her head and starts to leave.



MARGARET (CONT'D)  
I haven't seen you in months and  
you don't even say hi?

EM  
Seriously?

MARGARET  
Yes. You were going to call me?

EM  
Really?! Is this how you were for  
Dad after mom died? "You were going  
to call me?" Oh that's right he had  
us girls.  
(pause)  
We were 10 and 12!  
(pause)  
Marg, I am never going to call you.  
Not fucking EVER!

Em walks away leaving Margaret gobsmacked.

87 **INT. AQUATIC CENTRE - DAY**

Em in her TYR swim suit and silicon cap, fits her goggles  
snuggly. She's a woman who has completed a mission and about  
to start another.

Steve, Theo and other swimmers look her way but she's all  
business. Ready to vent an Olympic amount of anger.

Em dives in the pool. We see white water splash, separate and  
open up to an aqua blue expanse. We hear her long exhale and  
then inhale of breath and the black line on the bottom of the  
pool flies by.

MONTAGE

Em does a flip turn at the end of the pool, her legs SMACK  
the water and she pushes off the side of pool.

Em swims frontcrawl.

Em passes swimmers in her lane.

Em does another flip turn. SMACK.

Em swims backcrawl.

We see the blue ceiling float by.

Em swims breaststroke. Pull, kick, glide BREATHE.

Em swims butterfly. Pull, kick, kick, BREATHE.

BACK TO SCENE

Em stops at the end of the pool. Catches her breath, totally spent, pulls off her hat and goggles and ducks her head under the water.

When she surfaces Steve and Theo are in the next lane staring at her.

EM

What?

STEVE

That was a serious work-out?

EM

I told Marg to fuck off.

STEVE

I'm so proud of you. No more Margs.

Theo hugs Steve. Happy he's happy for Em.

88

**EXT. AQUATIC CENTRE - DAY**

Em with wet hair gets a goodbye hug from Steve and Theo. She has a healthy post swim glow and looks.. almost.. happy.

She walks down the sidewalk busy with families bringing their kids for lessons and in the crowd sees a man whose profile and the BLUE PLAID SHIRT make him a dead ringer for the photo of Hudson.

This time she chases after him. She bumps into a few kids and parents scowl.

She catches up to him and grabs his shoulder.

He turns.

PLAID SHIRT GUY

Whoa!

He looks nothing like Hudson. Not even Latino perhaps East Asian.

EM

Sorry. I'm so sorry.

She stares to convince herself. It's not him. It's not him.

EM (CONT'D)

I thought you were someone else.

Plaid shirt dude smiles. A bit flirty.

PLAID SHIRT GUY

That's cool.

EM

Ya no. Not cool.

She walks away the hint of happiness gone.

89

**INT. COUNSELLER OFFICE - DAY**

Office hasn't changed. Dr. Metcalf has chucked the cardigan but is sporting a slight beard. He looks old enough to counsel now but has a Batman T-shirt under his jacket.

DR. METCALF

It's good to see you again. I hear you've been going to group. How is that?

EM

You were right. I needed to share.

DR. METCALF

And group helped you with that?

EM

More than I thought. I wanted to see you again and thank you. And..  
(pause)  
I'm better but I still feel stuck.

DR. METCALF

Is there anything specifically that you think is holding you back?

EM

I keep seeing him. I know it's not him. It's crazy. But part of me has these weird thoughts that it was all a hoax and he's still alive.

DR. METCALF

You never had a funeral. You never got to see him or say goodbye. Perhaps it's time to have your own ceremony? Say goodbye.

EM  
I can do that.

DR. METCALF  
You can do that and why don't you ask for help? Usually the families help arrange the funerals. Not just the widow.

EM  
Thanks.

DR. METCALF  
When do you think you would like to do this.

EM  
Soon. The anniversary of his death is coming up. Same week as Lady Di and Mother Teresa.

Dr. Metcalf reflects.

DR. METCALF  
Everyone always forgets about Mother Teresa.

90 **EXT. EMMA'S NEW APT - DAY**

Aiden and Dee Dee walk past the couch with a big FREE sign on it. Aiden smiles.

91 **INT. EMMA'S NEW APT - DAY**

Aiden and Dee Dee enter Em's apartment. It's now clean but empty. Nowhere to sit.

Steve is already there and sits uncomfortably on the floor.

EM  
Sorry. I've ordered a couch. And chairs.

Everyone awkwardly sits on the floor.

EM (CONT'D)  
Next week is the anniversary of Hudson's death. And I'd like to have a ceremony. Say goodbye.  
(gathers herself)  
And I'd like you all to come and help me out.

DEE DEE  
Of course. What do you want?

EM  
I've gone through his things.

Em picks up a small box of Hudson's things: Batman comics, Albums, photos.

EM (CONT'D)  
I'd like to make a collage or a boat or something and burn it or put it out to sea. Maybe Steve and Aiden can help with that?

92 **EXT. BEACH DAY (AUGUST 28, 2000 TWO YEARS AFTER HUDSON'S DEATH)**

This is the same location Dee Dee found Em sitting on a rock.

We see Em's face bathed in magic-hour light that bounces off the ocean behind her.

On the sand in front of her we see her people stand in a messy semi circle. Everyone is in light coloured summer clothes. No somber funeral attire.

Dee Dee, in a summer dress, stands next to Aiden who is barefoot with rolled up slacks.

Steve in dress shorts stands next to Theo who wears slightly too short shorts.

Em looks around. Stalling.

EM  
I guess we should get started.

MR. B (O.S.)  
Oh Fuck!

Everyone turns to see Mr. B in a summer suit hold his knee that he's just whacked on a rock. He looks at the group, embarrassed.

Then clambers over logs to get to the beach.

Aiden goes to help him. Grabs his arm and helps him manage over one more rock.

AIDEN  
I'm so glad you came.

They move to the small group.

EM  
Trouble finding us?

MR. B  
Of course not. It's your favourite  
spot.

Em gives her dad a long hug, he fragilely hugs her back, and  
Dee Dee watches astonished, her heart opened.

EM  
Thanks Dad.

Everyone looks to Em to start.

EM (CONT'D)  
I don't know what to say. Thank you  
for coming. I just... I never got  
to say goodbye and I was  
hoping...maybe.

Em chokes up and has no more words.

DEE DEE  
I'd like to say something.

Em grateful.

DEE DEE (CONT'D)  
I know Hudson loved you Em. Very  
much. Because he let me live with  
you for six months and I was a  
pain. Maybe worse than you living  
with me.

A welcome chuckle from the group.

DEE DEE (CONT'D)  
I know he never meant to hurt  
you... but he did. I know he'd want  
you to be happy, even though he  
wasn't. Especially because he  
wasn't.  
(pause)  
You tried so, so hard to make him  
happy. You tried so hard to take  
care of him. But it's time to let  
him go.

Now Dee Dee chokes-up and Em steps in.

EM

Hudson played guitar, really badly. I didn't know this when I first met him. When he played me "Samba Para Ti" and spoke Spanish to me I was wooed.

Group chuckles.

EM (CONT'D)

He had practiced for weeks to impress me. That's what he did. He'd get something in his head and then wouldn't stop until he'd accomplished it. Especially if he thought it was something that would make me happy.

(pause)

The miracle is that even though he struggled, so hard, with depression he tried so hard to be happy and make others happy. He was a warrior. That's how I want to remember him. That's how I am saying goodbye.

Em moves to the side and on a rock behind her we see a wee wooden boat.

She lifts it and we see, more closely, a collage: photo of Hudson, batman comics, CD covers, a patch of the BLUE sweater.

Dee Dee presses play on a small boom box and a cassette plays Santana's "Samba Para Ti."

Em sparks a match and it fizzles. She lights another and the wee wooden boat begins to burn.

She gently places it on the water and pushes it out to sea.

Two Jet Skis roar past just off shore and their wake rolls towards the wee funeral boat. A wave SPLASHES onto the fiery mess and then it capsizes.

Mr. B "flips them the bird". And Yells.

MR. B

Water parasites!

Everyone is shocked and impressed.

Em JUMPS in the water to right her boat, and pushes it back out to sea but then... she takes a header in the water. SPLASH.

Everyone freezes.

Em looks through the water a kaleidoscope of blues, greens, and yellows refract through splashing water.

She comes up laughing.

AIDEN  
"Thank Jeezus."

Dee Dee jumps in to help her sister push the funeral boat out. Her sister is getting fucking closure, damnit.

They both stumble and dunk in head first. They hug.

Steve joins, and Theo takes off his shirt and jumps in after him.

Aiden and Mr. B watch this.

AIDEN (CONT'D)  
No, we don't have to join this part.

Aiden puts his arm around Mr. B and tears up. Happy tears.

We see Em soaked, water drips down her face into her tears. Her family surrounds her with wet hugs.

**AND OVER BLACK, THE TITLE CARD**

**SWIMMING**

93 INT. EM'S NEW APARTMENT - DAY (AUGUST 31, 2000 THREE YEARS LATER)

It's a year since Hudson's ocean funeral and her apartment is still not completely moved in but it's a start. A new couch and a few chairs have arrived. There are a few photos on the wall of Em and Dee Dee.

The TV is on in the background.

OS NEWS ANCHOR (O.S.)  
It's the three year anniversary of the death of Diana Princess of Wales.



She pauses to listen but doesn't look at screen.

She turns the TV off, takes a moment, then grabs her wetsuit, and heads out the door.

94

**EXT. OCEAN - DAY**

We see clouds fly by and then Em looking up at them.

Dee Dee is in the stern at the tiller steering. She is in control.

Em sits to the side, looks at her sister with gratitude and love.

She lays back in the harness. Hands free. Letting go!

**THE END**