

NEARLY DEPARTED

An original screenplay by

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(15 Page Excerpt)

INT. FLORIST SHOP IN BROOKLYN - DAY

Several long-stemmed roses sit in the shop refrigerator.

BRENDA FISHBEIN (30) points to one. She's wearing a dark dress, dark glasses, and a severe, spikey haircut.

BRENDA

That one. The tall, red one.

An exuberant Italian FLORIST (55) slides open the door.

FLORIST

Oh! She's very beautiful. Much too pretty to be all alone. I tell you what. I make you special deal--

BRENDA

I just want one.

Deflated, the Florist moves with the rose to the counter.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

And no fancy paper. Okay?

She pulls a flask from her pocket and takes a hit off it.

EXT. FLORIST SHOP IN BROOKLYN - DAY

Brenda exits the shop looking very pissed. That's because the rose is encased in brightly festive wrapping.

Waiting outside, EMILY BURKE (30s, lovely and ethereal) sees her with the flower.

EMILY

Awww. For me? That's so sweet.

(turning serious)

But this has to stop, Bren.

Ignoring her, Brenda moves to a trash can. She rips the wrapping off the mummified rose and tosses it.

EMILY (CONT'D)

You keep telling people you're 'over me.' But, clearly, you're not! You have to let me go.

Finished, Brenda walks away.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Hey wait.

EXT. A STREET IN BROOKLYN - DAY

Carrying the rose, Brenda walks down a street lined with Brownstones. Emily follows one step behind, still talking.

EMILY

You're whole trouble is you like to play tough, but you're really a mush-pie. If I knew that I never would've gone out with you.

She watches Brenda go up to a building and ring the bell.

EMILY (CONT'D)

That's not true. I wouldn't have missed a minute of what we had.

DANIEL LEE (30, fabulous but emotional) opens the door. Seeing Brenda, he bursts into tears and hugs her.

DANIEL

Oh muh God, oh muh God, oh muh God!

Brenda lamely pats his back. Seeing this, Emily cringes.

EMILY

Whoa. I can not deal with this.

INT. DANIEL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Having pulled himself together, Daniel leads Brenda in. The rest of his GUESTS are dressed in similar somber attire.

DANIEL

I'm so glad you came. I didn't see you at the service.

BRENDA

I was in the back, behind the nuns. I probably shouldn't have gone.

DANIEL

Don't be dramatic. It's not your style. And it causes wrinkles.

Just then, STEVIE FRANKS (30, a hissing python) slides in.

STEVIE

Jesus! You brought a flower? What do you think this is? A date?

DANIEL

Get away, Stevie. Now!

Stevie stalks off. Brenda hands Daniel her coat.

BRENDA
He's always so warm and welcoming.

DANIEL
Ignore that bitch. The rest of the
lipstick crew are here. Go say hi.

Brenda walks in, trying to avoid Stevie's hostile gaze.

She moves to a table covered with lit candles. They surround
a picture of Emily. In it she wears a 'Mona Lisa' smirk.

Brenda smiles, takes a picture of the tribute and mutters.

BRENDA
She hated that picture.

Emily appears next to her.

EMILY
Ugh. You got that right.

Brenda can't see or hear Emily because, well, she's a ghost.
Looking at the picture, Brenda begins to tear up.

GHOST EMILY
Oh no. Please. No crying. And don't
start rehashing everything again.

Brenda touches the picture frame. The ghost sighs.

GHOST EMILY (CONT'D)
I guess there's no stopping you, is
there?

Daniel's doorbell RINGS.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. DANIEL'S APARTMENT (TWO YEARS AGO) - DAY

Daniel whips open the door. He's much more jovial, matching
the mood of his raging party. Brenda's jovial too, wearing an
overcoat and longer hair. She's got a bottle of bourbon.

DANIEL
Finally! You're holding up the
Manhattans. Where's Brad?

BRENDA
Who knows? We're kaput.

DANIEL
Good. I never liked him.

BRENDA
So you told me. Many times.

She takes off her overcoat and looks around.

DANIEL
Gimme, gimme, gimme.

She hands him her coat.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
Not that. The bourbon. Throw your
coat in the tub and give me a hand.

Brenda pushes her way to the bathroom and tosses her coat.

She moves to the living room and sees a tall, striking woman; Emily. A GUY is talking her ear off. As he blathers on, Emily meets Brenda's eye and gives her a lingering look.

Brenda goes to the kitchen where Daniel preps the drinks.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
Start poking cherries.

Brenda pokes skewers into cherries as she glances at Emily.

BRENDA
Who's that?

DANIEL
Who's who? Oh, the glamazon. That's Emily Burke. She just started proofreading with us.

BRENDA
She keeps looking at me. Is she gay?

DANIEL
Not sure. Maybe. Lots of guys ask her out, but she always says 'no.'
(shaking the cocktails)
Anyway, stay away from her. She's Stevie's cousin. He'll rip your tits off if you go near her.

Brenda puts the skewers in the glasses. She looks up and sees Emily peeking at her as the guy chatters on.

BRENDA
Who's that with her? Edgar?

DANIEL
Shit. Yes! He's a horror. If he didn't have bad breath he'd have no personality at all.

Daniel pours the mix into the glasses.

BRENDA
You suppose she'd like a Manhattan?

DANIEL
Look at you, getting all flirty.

BRENDA
I'm not flirting. I want to save her before Edgar's breath melts her face. What's her name again?

DANIEL
Emily.

Brenda picks up two drinks and moves into the living room. Daniel watches her while sipping one of his creations.

EDGAR (27) is pressing a point as Brenda moves in.

EDGAR
I just can't see why an intelligent woman like you would, would ever--

BRENDA
Emmy! Great seeing you.
(to the guy)
Excuse us, Edgar.

Before he can say another word, Brenda spirits her away.

EMILY
Thank you, whoever you are.

BRENDA
Brenda. Fishbein. Of the Coney Island Fishbeins. Cheers!

She hands Emily a Manhattan and they clink glasses.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

Daniel says you're working with the lipstick crew on the night shift.

EMILY

Yeah. Why do they call it the 'lipstick' crew?

BRENDA

Because the the office is in a building that looks like a giant lipstick. I worked that shift. Don't the late hours kill you?

EMILY

No. I really like them.

BRENDA

Ha! You must be part vampire.

EMILY

Yes. But only a small part.

They share a smile and sip their drinks.

BRENDA

What was Edgar going on about?

EMILY

Smoking. He insists that I quit. But I can't. I've tried everything short of taping my mouth shut.

BRENDA

Don't do that. It's a good mouth. Perfect for sipping a Manhattan.

Stevie spots Brenda and plants himself next to her.

STEVIE

Brenda! I see you've met Emily. Where's your better half?

BRENDA

We broke up. Two weeks ago. Now I'm the better half.

STEVIE

Well, it's nice that you've moved on. But then, you're good at that.

BRENDA

Speaking of 'moving on', you should try it sometime. Like right now.

STEVIE

Just leave my cousin alone, okay?

Stevie moves off. Brenda sighs and turns to Emily.

BRENDA

Sorry. We have history. I got drunk one night and slept with Stevie's boyfriend. Then they broke up and Stevie got tossed out. He blames me and says I ruined his life with my 'toxic vagina.' Anyway, what were we talking about?

EMILY

Smoking. As in, I need a cigarette. Badly.

EXT. BROOKLYN STREET (TWO YEARS AGO) - DAY

Holding her drink, Brenda shivers in the frigid air. Emily smokes a cigarette and doesn't appear at all cold.

BRENDA

Shit! The last time I was this cold paramedics were involved. You're not freezing?

EMILY

I'm Canadian. This is like spring for me. Go in. I'll be fine.

BRENDA

I'll suffer. It's worth it to avoid Stevie. So... what's your story?

EMILY

What do you mean?

Brenda takes a bracing slug from her Manhattan.

BRENDA

All I know is that you're a tall, Canadian vampire. And Daniel says you don't date. Why is that?

EMILY

I just don't like to get serious.

BRENDA

Same here. I hate 'serious.' That's why everything I do is completely frivolous. Even my job.

EMILY
What do you do?

BRENDA
I write speeches for Jack Masters.
Ever hear of him?

EMILY
Sure. The motivational guy. He
doesn't write his own speeches?

BRENDA
Nobody can be that motivational all
the time. So I punch up his stuff.
I also do spoken word. That is, I
used to. When I had more time.

EMILY
I write too. Songs. I came here
hoping to be a singer slash
songwriter. But so far I'm just a
singer slash terrified.

BRENDA
What are you afraid of?

EMILY
The audience. I have horrible stage
fright. Doesn't it scare you?

BRENDA
Nah. Try this. Just look out and
imagine everybody naked. Well, not
everybody. Just the cute people.
(not giving up)
I can help you with that. I know
some spots where you could go
onstage and try stuff out.

Emily looks at Brenda between drags and almost weakens.

EMILY
No. I shouldn't.

BRENDA
Why not? You want to sing, don't
you? Come on. We'll have fun.

EMILY
I really can't.

BRENDA
You're against fun? You just said
you don't like 'serious.'

EMILY
Yeah but-- Thanks anyway.

BRENDA
So that's a 'no?' I don't like
'no.' 'No' is so final. You should
try 'maybe.'

EMILY
Is this you being motivational?

BRENDA
No. I'm being insistent. I'm also
intrigued and delighted and
freezing. So can we try 'maybe?'

EMILY
(smiling)
Okay. Maybe.

END FLASHBACK

INT. DANIEL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Still standing by Emily's picture, Brenda feels her silenced
phone BUZZING in her pocket. She answers it.

BRENDA
Hello. This is Brenda.

WOMAN (O.S.)
Ms. Fishbein, it's Acroda Capital.
We need to talk about your loan.

Upset, Brenda hurriedly hangs up. Ghost Emily sees this.

GHOST EMILY
You'd better talk to those people.
You've been ducking out on them
since before I checked out.

Brenda tucks away the phone and moves to the kitchen. Ghost
Emily follows her and watches her fill a glass with whiskey.

GHOST EMILY (CONT'D)
Oh man. Will you stop? Please?

The lights above the counter flicker. Emily responds to it.

GHOST EMILY (CONT'D)
I am trying. But she can't see or
hear me. What am I supposed to do?

The lights flicker again. Emily answers.

GHOST EMILY (CONT'D)
Of course I care about her. That's
why I'm here, right? To help her?
Or did you bring me back to punish
me for being a shitty girlfriend?
And make me watch her suffer.

Ghost Emily sadly watches Brenda take a slug of booze.

GHOST EMILY (CONT'D)
(to the heavens)
She keeps drinking and obsessing
about me. I mean... what's next?

In the living room, Daniel calls out to the crowd.

DANIEL
Everybody, listen. Brenda gave me
this. It's a song by Emily.

Daniel hits 'play' on his remote. The stereo plays the guitar
intro to THE SONG. Ghost Emily growls toward the heavens.

GHOST EMILY
I'll get you for this.

Listening to THE SONG, Brenda's mind drifts back in time.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

EXT. EAST VILLAGE CLUB (TWO YEARS AGO) - DAY

Brenda's waiting outside. Emily anxiously rushes up with her
guitar. The intro to THE SONG continues as they go in.

INT. SMALL DOWNTOWN CLUB (TWO YEARS AGO)- DAY

The twenty or so cafe tables are empty except for Brenda.
Emily sits onstage, tentatively playing and singing.

EMILY
(singing)
My heart is calling home
Though we said goodbye

Her voice is horrible. So bad that Brenda has to pinch her
leg hard to keep from laughing. Emily sings the chorus.

EMILY (CONT'D)
(singing)
I can feel your finger tips
I still taste your tender lips
The memory never slips
It's haunting me

Walking in, a DELIVERY GUY (25) calls out to Brenda.

DELIVERY GUY
Jesus! Somebody stranglin' a cat?
(seeing Emily)
Oh. Sorry.

Emily stops singing. She's crushed.

EXT. LIPSTICK BUILDING (TWO YEARS AGO) - NIGHT

Later that night, Emily smokes and cries as she carries the guitar to her job. Brenda awkwardly pats her back as they go.

EMILY
It's true! I have no business being
onstage. I'm just plain rotten.
(reacting to Brenda)
Please. Stop hovering.

BRENDA
I'm not hovering. I was comforting.
Patting a sobbing person's back is
my signature comforting move.

EMILY
I should never have moved here. I
should go home. Right now.

BRENDA
Why?

EMILY
Because I have no talent!

BRENDA
Not for singing, no. But the song
was really good. Personally, I'm
relieved. Before I heard you sing I
thought you were perfect. I'm
thrilled to find out you're human.

Emily stabs out her smoke.

EMILY

Ugh. Look at me. I have to go into work. And I'm a wreck.

BRENDA

You're stunning.

Unable to hear it, she picks up the guitar and moves off.

EMILY

Thanks for trying to help. G'night.

EXT. LIPSTICK BUILDING (TWO YEARS AGO) - DAY

It's morning. People arrive for work as the exhausted night crew stumbles out. Daniel walks out with Emily.

They see Brenda waiting with a tray of take-out coffee cups.

BRENDA

Morning. I didn't know how you like your coffee so I got an assortment. I have your basic black, milk no sugar, milk and sugar--

DANIEL

Any with bourbon? No? Okay.

He grabs a coffee and scoots. Emily turns to Brenda.

EMILY

What are you doing here?

BRENDA

I'm walking you home. How was work?

EMILY

Tedious, mindless, and torturous.

BRENDA

Is that the name of the firm you work for?

She laughs as they walk off. Stevie Franks exits the building and, seeing them, silently hisses disapproval.

EXT. BROOKLYN STREET (TWO YEARS AGO) - DAY

Emily and Brenda stroll up to Emily's place.

BRENDA

The point is there's no shame in just being a writer. I couldn't sell a calzone to a starving Italian. But I can write a great speech for somebody who can.

EMILY

I guess. I just always saw myself doing both.

Emily opens the gate to a three story Brownstone and moves inside. Brenda gathers the courage to follow her in.

BRENDA

Hey! I, uh, called a singer I know. I asked if she'd do your song at an open mic. And she said 'sure.'

EMILY

What? For real? That's fantastic.

Emily hugs her. Overwhelmed, Brenda pats her back.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Uh. You're patting again.

BRENDA

Sorry. It's a reflex.

EMILY

This is so wonderful. Thank you, Brenda. You're an angel.

BRENDA

Hardly. I was raised to help out. You should see me sort socks.

EMILY

Would you like to come up for a bit?

BRENDA

Yeah. I would. But I'm late for work. Some other time.

EMILY

Okay. Good night.

She impulsively kisses Brenda on the lips.

BRENDA

(smiling)

Good morning.

EXT. BROOKLYN STREET (INTERCUT WITH FLASHBACK) - DAY

Standing outside Emily's gate, watching this memory unfold, is present-day Brenda. Ghost Emily is standing behind her.

They both watch as 'flashback Emily' walks up to her door.

GHOST EMILY

Yeah. That was nice. But you can't
live in the past. You have to--
(looking at her past self)
Oh wow. I miss that coat.

As the FLASHBACK FADES, Brenda walks inside the gate and places the red rose on the steps, where they first kissed.

GHOST EMILY (CONT'D)

Again, very sweet. So, are we done?

Not hearing her, Brenda walks off. Emily exhales her annoyance as she watches her go.

EXT. QUEENSBORO PLAZA STATION - NIGHT

The N train comes up from underground into what's left of the afternoon light. It rattles forward into Queens.

INT. N TRAIN - NIGHT

Brenda sits in a mostly empty car, staring out at the setting sun. Ghost Emily sits opposite her, taking in the scene.

GHOST EMILY

I remember the first time I saw you
onstage. You were talking about
love. How your grandmother, your
'bubbie', told you when you fell in
love, you'd hear bells. How, after
every date, she'd ask 'Any bells?'
Don't you want to feel like that?
About a person who's alive?
(looking at her)
God, I wish I could talk to you.

The lights in the train flicker. Ghost Emily looks up at a poster on the wall. It reads, 'MAKE IT HAPPEN.'

GHOST EMILY (CONT'D)

Great idea. But how?

The lights flicker again. Another poster reads, 'CALL TODAY!'

GHOST EMILY (CONT'D)
Call her? Like on the phone? Okay.

Emily concentrates. Hard. Brenda's phone buzzes.

GHOST EMILY (CONT'D)
Ha! Nailed it!

Brenda checks her phone. The Caller I.D. says 'Potential Spam' so she clicks it off. Emily's outraged.

GHOST EMILY (CONT'D)
No. It's not 'Spam!' It's me!

Brenda sees she has a lot of missed calls. Some from 'Boss Man' and some from Acroda Capital. It RINGS and she answers.

The voice of JACK MASTERS (55) bellows from the phone.

JACK (O.S.)
Bren! I've been calling you all day. Where you been?

BRENDA
(into phone)
I was at a memorial. For Emily.

JACK (O.S.)
Oh. Good. So are you finally done with all that?

BRENDA
I don't know.

JACK (O.S.)
Well, work on it. Speaking of work, I need you in the office tomorrow. Eight o'clock. Sharp. And look sharp. Okay?

BRENDA
Okay.

She clicks the phone off.

GHOST EMILY
Good idea. Go do some work. Maybe that'll get you back on track.

Brenda pulls her flask out and takes a gulp.

GHOST EMILY (CONT'D)
Or, maybe not.