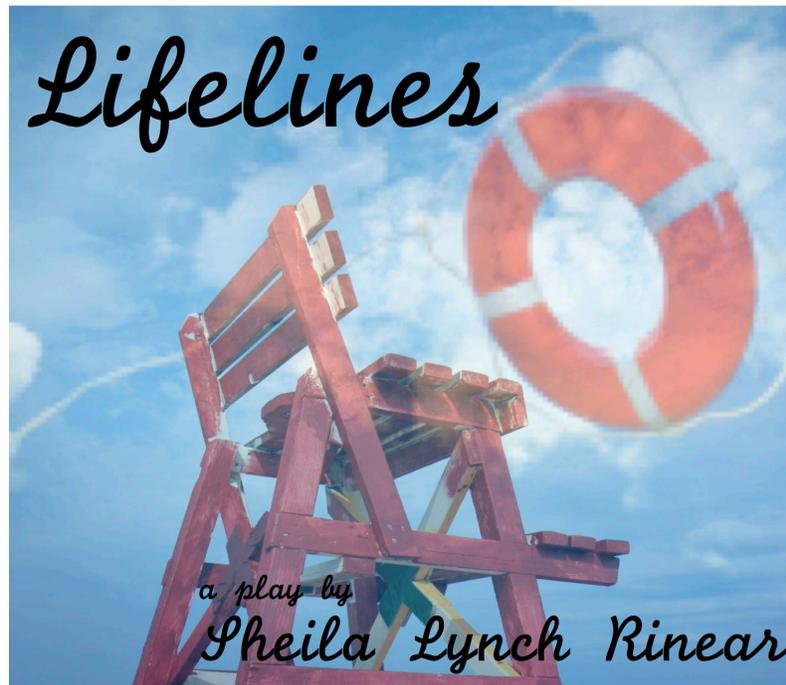


PERUSAL SCRIPT



by **Sheila Rinear**

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Newport, Maine

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LIFELINES

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LIFELINES CAST LIST

Greek Chorus #1(also Detective)

Greek Chorus #2

Greek Chorus #3

Greek Chorus #4 (also Sally)

Greek Chorus #5 (also Teacher)

Greek Chorus #6 (also Little Kid on beach)

Greek Chorus #7 (also Little Kid on beach)

Greek Chorus #8 (also Mother on beach)

Greek Chorus #9 (also Monty Bernardino)

Greek Chorus #10 (also Doctor in VA Hospital)

Greek Chorus #11 (also Doctor's assistant in VA Hospital)

Greek Chorus #12

NELL - PSYCHIATRIST

MICHAEL - NELL'S ROMANTIC INTEREST

DORA - NELL'S ASSISTANT

JOHNNY - NELL'S DECEASED BROTHER

AL - NELL'S 83 YEAR OLD PATIENT

GRADY - 16 YEAR OLD STUDENT

LILY - 16 YEAR OLD STUDENT

FRAN - MIDDLE AGED WIDOW/PATIENT

FATHER - KEVIN'S FATHER

MOTHER - KEVIN'S MOTHER

NOTE: This cast of Characters can be played by a large high school/college/university ensemble or it can be played by an abbreviated cast:

NELL

GRADY

LILY

KEVIN

MICHAEL

2 Female Greek Chorus Members who play all Female Supporting Roles

2 Male Greek Chorus Members who play all Male Supporting Roles

LIFELINES by Sheila Lynch Rinear 6M 5F + 12 Greek Chorus (5M 7F playing major and smaller roles) Open staging. Contemporary costumes. (*Perfect for High Schools, Colleges/Universities, Community, Church and Professional theatres.*) Lifelines is the story of a grief counselor (Nell Hennessey) who has a reputation as an expert in helping others get through the pain of losing loved ones to suicide. Her assumed expertise lies in the fact that she herself has lost a brother to suicide. But when Nell recognizes her own signs of depression and that she is merely handing out platitudes and text book answers to her hurting patients' quests for help and peace, Nell must decide to seek help herself. By working with some sincere and relentless teens who push the counselor with deep and searing questions, Nell realizes that she still has to go through the pain of her own loss in order to be effective in helping others. As Nell walks her journey, she is accompanied by some loyal and lively characters who pull her from the brink of despair and back onboard the good ship hope. This provocative and healing story of surviving suicide was premiered by San Antonio's Ronald Reagan High School in February, 2005. **Order #3168**

Sheila Rinear is a San Antonio-based, award-winning playwright, screenwriter, and teacher. Her work has been commissioned, developed and produced throughout the United States but especially in Texas where The Playhouse San Antonio, The Classic Theatre, and The Overtime Theatre are her artistic homes. Commissioned six times in the past 8 years by the City of San Antonio to produce performance pieces for Luminaria, Sheila also teaches Playwriting and Screenwriting at NESA (San Antonio Arts Magnet High School) and serves The Dramatists Guild as Regional Rep for Austin-San Antonio. For more, see: www.sheilarinear.com

LIFELINES

Act 1

Scene -- The stage is set with various ramps and platforms. At the start of the play, lights come up on the GREEK CHORUS and NELL. There are 12 Greek Chorus members total. The Greek Chorus will be labeled throughout the script as: GC#1, GC#2, etc.

GC#1: As Daybreak streaks across the sky calling earthbound mortals to wake...

GC#7-12: It reminds our dreaming hearts: our lost one may no longer participate.

GC#2: As nighttime kisses the day good-bye leaving us alone we find...

GC#7-12: Torrential thoughts of lost ones keep pressing on our minds.

GC#3: With each action and thought we must expend to get through our daily strife...

GC#7-12: We are choked with the realization: YOU no longer share our life.

GC#4: The forsaken pets you so used to love, sadly search, hoping you'll be found...

GC#7-12: They little suspect you lie, unmoving, deep in the cold, dark ground.

GC#5: In grocery stores, restaurants, fast food pick-up in the car...

GC#7-12: The aromas pull our minds to wondering how and where you are.

GC#6: Thanksgiving, New Years, Valentine's, your birthday! Any special day at all...

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GC#7-12: We think of you and desperately wish that you could give us a call.

GC#12: In spring we used to sigh, thrilled at bursting new flowers in bloom...

GC#1-12: Now flowers take our memories back to your funeral and thoughts of doom.

GC#11: The glory of late-night daylight from those playful summer skies...

GC#1-6: Instead hangs like rain clouds because unwanted tears fill our eyes.

GC#10: When the leaves start to die in the crispness of autumn...

GC#1-6: We recall how your company made us once believe in heaven.

GC#9: Our winters are so cold now. Not just the ground is frozen...

GC#1-6: We can find no way to respond to the death that you have chosen.

GC#8: We'll look for you forever; and forever without ending...

GC#1-6: To ask what you and I might have done differently to bring about a healing...a mending.

GC#7: In our broken lives we sadly know: nothing can ever be the same...

NELL: Because in those hearts of which you were a part, we forever feel anger...

ALL: Anger and blame!

(A hard hitting instrumental rock song plays as the GREEK CHORUS exits. As the music continues, the following take their "tableau" places: AL, an elderly man holding empty pill bottles; GRADY, a 16 year old kneeling at a military grave indicated by a white cross; LILY, a 17 year old looking at a framed picture she holds; FRAN, a middle aged woman standing at a rail

PERUSAL SCRIPT -- LIFELINES by Sheila Lynch Rinear

with yellow police tape around it. Down Left a HUSBAND and WIFE stand holding onto each other. As NELL walks Down Center, the others hold a freeze frame. The music stops as NELL looks out front and speaks.)

NELL: I'm a grief counselor. I've been counseling families of suicide victims for years now. I daresay I've achieved a reputation as a bit of a guru for those stricken with emotional paralysis. Over what? Over loved ones' bringing their lives to an abrupt end. They want to understand why these persons who meant so much to them removed themselves from their world.

(Beat as she looks around at the various "tableaux" members/patients. Then out front to AUDIENCE/COUNSELOR.)

I have no answers. Nothing effective to tell them. No solutions as to how they might put their lives back together. But because I am a counselor who also has experienced losing a loved one to suicide, I'm supposed to be an expert. I am not an expert. And I feel like a fake. A phony.

(LIGHTS off on all but NELL)

So, there you have it. That's why I'm here, Doctor. I need your help. I didn't want to go back to Dr. Truman. Didn't want him to think he hadn't "cured" me 4 years ago after my Brother's suicide. I'm hoping you'll be able to help me put my own life together so that I can...

(She's listening)

My symptoms? I've been having insomnia. The first big sign of depression, right? As I lie awake night after night, my Brother...and my patients...drift in and out of my thoughts. A haunting presence.

(LIGHTS come up on AL. NELL continues to speak out to AUDIENCE/COUNSELOR.)

NELL: Al is usually the first to show up. 83 years old. His wife took her life by overdosing on her medicine.

AL: I shouldn't have complained about how much the medicine was costing. All I really cared about was Rox getting better. She was so sick. Towards the end she never had any good days. Still, I was hoping she'd turn a corner...and come back to me. Maybe I should've known something was wrong when she never gave me that sweet little smile of hers anymore.

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NELL: I got Al on medication himself and he came to see me for a few months. But then...

AL: I appreciate all you're doing for me, Doctor, but I gotta watch the old budget, you know.

NELL: I thought your insurance covered your visits here.

AL: Only to a point. Like Rox's meds. Gosh, you should only see the balance I still gotta pay on her medical bills. I wonder if I'll live long enough to pay them off.

NELL: Al, listen...

AL: Sorry, Doc. Can't afford your services. Hey, that's the way it goes, dear. Don't worry, I'll be fine. Thanks for all you've done.

(AL goes into freeze frame. 2 GREEK CHORUS members enter.)

NELL: I did nothing more than put a Band-Aid on Al's hemorrhaging life. I often wonder how Al's doing. Such a dear old guy.

GC#1: Six million elderly persons suffer some form of depression.

GC#2: But three-quarters of those cases are undiagnosed and untreated.

PERUSAL SCRIPT -- LIFELINES by Sheila Lynch Rinear

(LIGHT fades on AL and the GREEK CHORUS members. NELL works at her laptop as MICHAEL, a kind man pursuing Nell's time and heart, enters her space. MICHAEL peers over her shoulder and reads aloud.)

MICHAEL: "Octogenarians?" Elderly patients?

NELL: *(turning, smiling to see him)* I've seen several this week. They're all depressed and I'm worried about putting them on anything that would contra-indicate their other medications.

MICHAEL: Would your having kept our dinner date "contra-indicate" anything?

NELL: *(looking at her watch)* Michael, I am so sorry. I messed up again, didn't I?

MICHAEL: We can always get Chinese take-out.

NELL: I can't...tonight. I've got some stuff here I've got to read. Forgive me?

(MICHAEL gently kisses the top of her head.)

I don't know why you put up with me.

MICHAEL: I hope some day you figure it out.

(MICHAEL leaves as she stands to watch him. NELL speaks front to AUDIENCE/COUNSELOR.)

NELL: My work is piling higher every day, Doctor. There's so much to read...to keep up on this suicide epidemic. New publications and studies almost daily.

(Looking at an article)

850,000 reported suicides last year and the World Health Organization figures there probably were at least 2 times more than that not reported. Why not reported? Lots of reasons. The stigma attached to suicide, not getting the deceased's insurance. Well, you know, I'm sure we read lots of the same publications. And their figures do not even include the military suicides.

(DORA, NELL's administrative assistant, enters and hands NELL a ton of files with one hand and holds onto a box of tissues w/other.)

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DORA: Gosh, Boss, only 7 patients today. Shall I send out for some batteries to keep you energized like that bar-raising Bunny?

(NELL smiles and waves her away.)

By the way, Michael's called twice to remind you of your lunch date.

NELL: Dora, could you call him and cancel for me?

(Lifting files as cause)

There's no way I can meet him today.

DORA: You do realize you've canceled on him 2 days already this week? And now I get to tell him you're punking out on him again. Great! Did you know that in ancient Rome if someone didn't like the message they got, they shot the messenger?

NELL: Michael won't shoot you, Dora.

DORA: Well, I wouldn't blame him if he did.

NELL: He won't.

DORA: Cause he's so darned nice. I mean, you can see that, right?

NELL: It's hard to miss.

DORA: Then, hello...why are you...

NELL: Maybe I'm uncomfortable around some one as emotionally healthy as he is.

DORA: But you seem comfortable around me.

(Looking after Michael)

Man! Why can't I find a guy like that?

(DORA shakes her head, hands NELL a box of tissues and freeze-frames while NELL talks out front to AUDIENCE/COUNSELOR.)

NELL: I don't know what I'd do with out Dora, Doctor. She keeps me and my practice going.

DORA: *(coming out of freeze-frame)* I think you'll need these for your next appointment.

(NELL takes the tissues, watches DORA exit, then talks to AUDIENCE/COUNSELOR out front as lights come up on FRAN.)

NELL: Fran came in next. She hit my roster at the height of my colleagues' sending me all their suicide survivors. Again, I felt as though I had nothing to give her...to ease her pain.

FRAN: I've gone over every detail of our marriage a dozen times. Nothing could have given me a clue that he'd take his life.

NELL: *(out front, to AUDIENCE/COUNSELOR)* Her husband, a prominent physician, saw his last patient one day and then cleverly hooked himself up to a lethal dose of a sedative and took his life. Poor Fran. The police had to question her to be sure it wasn't homicide.

FRAN: Who would want to kill him? Certainly not me. He was my rock. Why would the police question me as though I killed the man I wanted to grow old with?

NELL: Not only are these suicide survivors left with the devastation of their loss, but shame is often heaped on them as if they might have had something to do with the "crime."

(GREEK CHORUS #3, as a detective, enters Fran's space.)

GC#3: Sorry to cause you any distress, ma'am, but it is a crime you know. We've always got to investigate a murder. Your husband's life has been taken. We've just got to ask a few more questions to determine who took it. You understand.

FRAN: Understand? What I now understand is this: people who lose loved ones to suicide are not allowed to mourn their passing...the way normal people are permitted to mourn when someone they love dies. And instead of the deceased getting respect for having led a wonderful life, like my husband, their lives are forever shrouded in suspicion and judgment.

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(Completely distraught)

What should I have done?

NELL: The families of the suicide victims receive little sympathy. Surrounded by doubts they come to me.

(GREEK CHORUS #4 and #5 enter.)

GC#4: *(with the panache of a night club MC)* I give you: doubt.

GC#5: Doubt that comes from a mistaken belief that we somehow failed.

GC#4: When in fact, most of us did the best we knew how to in loving our dear ones afflicted with depression.

PERUSAL SCRIPT -- LIFELINES by Sheila Lynch Rinear

(LIGHTS fade on Fran and the Detective. GREEK CHORUS members exit as NELL walks toward a young man, JOHNNY, in a Naval peacoat standing in a haunting light. NELL calls to him.)

NELL: Johnny? What should I have done?

(As LIGHTS fade on Johnny, NELL speaks out front to her AUDIENCE/COUNSELOR.)

That question has hung on for years...rattling around like thunder in the distance. Always threatening a storm. Do I run for higher, safer ground? Or, do I hunker down and prepare myself for the cataclysmic storm I've sensed has been approaching me for a long time?

(Pulling herself together, she thinks it through and returns to her own office area.)

Okay. Here's the premise I go on: One day we will each have our last day on earth. Most of us can't or don't want to think about that. But people who take their own lives do think about it. If someone asked me, "Would you like to take time to consider your death?" I'd probably say, "That'd really be inconvenient right now." Or, "Hey, I'm busy trying to make the most of life."

(NELL sorts through files, hands them to DORA who enters and takes them, giving her more. NELL opens her laptop and gazes at it. Then, out front

NELL: Why do some of us seem to run towards death, while others of us constantly run away from it?

(Smiles as MICHAEL enters.)

I date this guy, Michael. Or, he tries to date me. He's so grounded. So...so, healthy in his outlook. He says he thinks of death as...

MICHAEL: ...a far-away, down the line payoff. "Eternal rest" for wearing yourself out. Like a paycheck for hard work done well. You earn it.

NELL: What, I'm supposed to think of God as an accountant?

MICHAEL: No. Just believe that someday Whoever created us will take us all home. It's so simple, Nell. Don't overthink it.

NELL: *(to Michael)* Simple? When someone who's been sitting beside you on the "train of life" suddenly jumps off while the train's at high speed, or drowns in the water without even calling for help so we'd know to throw a lifeline...it's this break from the natural order that's so difficult to accept.

MICHAEL: Why? Because you don't want to think about the consequences a person who commits suicide would face?

NELL: Consequences? The consequence is that my Brother is dead. And I am alone with my childhood memories of life with him.

MICHAEL: That's your choice...to think you're alone.

(LIGHTS down on MICHAEL. GREEK CHORUS members #6&7 enter.)

GC#6: The ones left behind stand at the brink of what? Despair? Anger? Sadness? Disbelief? Any emotion that they dare not feel...cannot share.

GC#7: Unable to trust once again loving others. Such lonely hearts. Totally unfair.

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(GC#6&7 exit.)

NELL: *(back to AUDIENCE/COUNSELOR)* You want to know when I realized I was in trouble?

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(She thinks)

It was when I started treating Kevin's parents. Bingo! Yes. Everything at work was...had become so routine...mechanical. One day I realized I was numb. I felt...no...I could feel...nothing.

(LIGHTS come up on Kevin's PARENTS.)

MOTHER: *(to her husband)* Nothing? You can stand there and have nothing to say?

FATHER: I'd rather we not discuss this here, now.

MOTHER: Then when and where would you like to discuss it?

FATHER: *(quietly sad)* Maybe someday when I'm ready to admit my son decided he didn't have enough courage to face life.

(Walking off)

Someday when I'm ready to figure out what we did wrong.

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(FATHER exits as MOTHER walks to NELL's office, speaking to NELL as she walks.)

MOTHER: I felt like I had not only lost my precious son, but I realized I was losing my husband, too.

NELL: You and your family have endured some heavy losses lately, haven't You?

(MOTHER nods.)

You mentioned Kevin's grandfather.

MOTHER: Yes, he died of cancer last year. Kevin adored him.

NELL: So he took his Grandfather's death hard?

MOTHER: You could say that. He blamed God. And me.

NELL: Why do you think he did that?

MOTHER: I'm the one who always urged Kevin to pray for his Grandad's recovery. You've never seen anyone pray so hard...and...

NELL: Be so disappointed when his prayers weren't answered the way he told God to answer them?

MOTHER: Yes. Oh yes. He took things so hard. His emotional response to everything was always completely over the top.

NELL: When did that start?

MOTHER: Actually he's been like that almost since birth. If he didn't get fed right away, or like when he was a toddler, if another child wanted him to share a toy, he'd scream and cry like it was the end of the world.

NELL: Was he equally exuberant when he was happy?

MOTHER: He'd go through the roof with joy. It was like living with a Jekyll and Hyde. I think that's why my husband never seemed to mind that his job kept him on the road all the time.

NELL: That had to be tough on you.

MOTHER: I am...I was always exhausted from trying to keep the peace.

(LIGHTS come up on KEVIN. He's holding a report card.)

KEVIN: *(really happy)* Dad, you're home. Look. I passed. Calculus. I passed.

(KEVIN hands the report card to his FATHER, who scowls.)

FATHER: Let me get this straight. You're this excited because you got a 73 in Calculus? What college will be

excited to get you with a grade like that?

KEVIN: *(suddenly furious)* Thanks, Dad. I mean it. Thanks a hell of a lot for being so supportive of all the tutoring I went to. I passed. Can't anything I do satisfy you?

FATHER: Take it easy, son. I just mean that I know how bright you are. I think you can get higher grades. Do you get along with your calculus teacher?

KEVIN: You're unbelievable. Unbelievable. As far as you're concerned, I should probably just...just leave...get out of town...get out of your life. Huh?

FATHER: I can't communicate with you when you get defensive like that, son.

KEVIN: Fine. I'll go get mellow. I'll get drunk or something. Then maybe we can "communicate."

(KEVIN storms off. So does FATHER...in the opposite direction.)

MOTHER: He started drinking and God only knows what else. It's been a nightmare for a few years now. I mean, I know teens have a rough time of it, but Kevin seemed to make it rougher than he needed to.

NELL: Was there any one incident that might have "been the straw that broke the camel's back?" Something that immediately led up to his taking his life?

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MOTHER: Yes. He thought he was in love. With Sally. For a while that had seemed to ease his pain about losing his Granddad.

NELL: Had Kevin ever been checked for depression?

MOTHER: I talked to his Father about getting him some help after his Granddad's death. But it was about that same time Kevin fell hard for this little girl.

NELL: Did she love him back?

MOTHER: Sally was sweet to him, but she's just a sweet kid. Kevin is, was, sooo intense. I tried to warn him not to scare her off with his intensity. Writing her poems and songs daily. Staying up all night composing. Inspired by her love.

NELL: Or, possibly inspired by a bipolar illness.

MOTHER: I've read so much about that since...my son's...

NELL: Since your son's suicide. I know. It's very hard to say.

MOTHER: He got almost...almost crazy...when Sally said she didn't want to date him. He had written songs for her that he wanted to play at the school dance. He'd gotten invited to play at homecoming. He was really so good with his music. So gifted.

NELL: Did he play her song? At the school dance?

MOTHER: Yes. That's the really confusing part. He seemed to forget that Sally had broken it off with him. He told me he had written even more new music for her, sure that it would make her understand how much he loved her. He was so happy.

(KEVIN and his BAND are setting up, or if there is not a band available, the actor playing KEVIN can play air guitar while recorded music plays for effect.)

NELL: Unfortunately he may have been happy because he had made up his mind about ending his life if she continued to reject him. That's how it happens sometimes. They get a plan together and feel relieved.

MOTHER: There's so much more I wish I had known. I should have known. Instead of just thinking he was

difficult, I could have helped him. Oh what should I have done?

NELL: You are not alone with that question. Trust me.

(KEVIN's MOTHER hands NELL some sheets of paper.)

MOTHER: These were his new songs.

(KEVIN and his band play the last part of an upbeat song that KIDS -the Greek Chorus-- are dancing to while NELL reads over the sheets of music. At the dance, after song is over, the KIDS applaud and a TEACHER steps forward, grappling for the mic.)

TEACHER: Great. Thank you Kevin. Members of the band. Are you all having a good time?

(KIDS enthusiastically react.)

Well good. Is this mic on? Good. Good. Listen up.

(Excited to have chance to speak at mic)

I want you to remember: don't drink and drive.

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(Hesitating letting go of mic as KEVIN tries to regain the mic so the TEACHER won't further embarrass him/herself)

Um...stay in school. Right. Okay now. You said you had a dedication, Kevin?

KEVIN: *(looking right at Sally)* I do. For a very special lady and Sally knows who she is.

(Then the BAND plays the song...a ballad and KEVIN sees his SALLY dance with another guy when he's singing the song he's dedicated to her. KEVIN stops, unplugs his guitar and storms off, telling the other members of the band to do the same. They ALL leave the stage and the KIDS at the dance are really upset. The TEACHER comes to the mic.)

TEACHER: I guess that's it for the band. Anyone got some music we can hook up?

(The KIDS are furious, calling out what a rip off to not have a band, etc.)

Alright. This dance is done. Go home. Be careful driving.

(The KIDS exit calling out to each other about where they'll go to party, etc. The stage is empty except for NELL and MOTHER. NELL is looking over the music MOTHER had handed her. NELL gasps when she looks at one of the papers. The MOTHER looks at it and nods.)

MOTHER: That's what I found on his computer screen after the police called and said they'd found...his body.

(LIGHTS come up on KEVIN as he recites the following, with sounds of surf in the background.)

KEVIN: I want to see the sunset as I stand on mountaintop

The wind will float upon me without urging me to stop

And then I'll free-fall downward rushing quickly to my end

No fears, no heartbreaks will find me ever, ever again.

(Lights down on KEVIN and come back up on NELL. The MOTHER has exited.)

NELL: His lyrics were so sad. They made me cry. Hard.

(Out front to her Counselor)

Doctor, I could really feel his pain. His wanting it to be gone. Help me? Please? I'm going to lose everything if I don't get my life together? But how do I do that?

(DORA leads MICHAEL in.)

DORA: *(like a TV game show host)* Drum roll! And now, don't say I never bring you surprises, Boss. The one, the only: Michael. Your two o'clock appointment. Ta-DA!

MICHAEL: I thought it a clever way of getting some time with you.

NELL: Forgive me. I've been a rather "wretched" romantic interest, haven't I?

MICHAEL: You've been busy saving the world. While I admire that, I'd like to go on record as saying I'd like to be more than someone you work into your schedule.

NELL: I'd like that, too, Michael. I'm so...disorganized and unfocused lately. Like I'm not near as efficient as I think I usually am.

(Tries to laugh it off)

I don't know what my problem is.

MICHAEL: Isn't that why you're going for counseling...to find out?

NELL: Such a smarty pants I'm trying to date here.

MICHAEL: "Trying?" Delighted to hear you're making the effort.

NELL: So, what's up?

MICHAEL: We both agreed to take vacation time next week, right? Why don't we make plans to go to the coast? Eat some good seafood? Walk the beach?

(NELL walks away from him)

Now hear me out: we could clear out your brother's house while we're at it. You are the executor of his estate and you did tell me that your Counselor has advised you to take care of that as part of your therapy.

(Pulls out tickets)

But if you don't want to do that at your vacation time, I've booked a cruise I'd like to take you on.

NELL: I know you're trying to help, but Michael I can't.

MICHAEL: Why?

NELL: For one thing, I've got these high school students I'm scheduled to talk to. Kevin's Mother and Father asked me to cooperate with the Principal and offer counseling to the kids.

(Quick kiss)

First things first.

(As MICHAEL leaves, DORA moans and watches him go.)

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DORA: A cruise sounds like a first things first deal to me.

NELL: You've been eavesdropping, Dora.

DORA: Never. Your door was open...kinda.

NELL: Dora, did you get me the directions to that high school where I'm supposed to speak?

DORA: *(resigned to her Boss's gloom, she holds out keys)* I already entered the directions in your car's GPS. Here are your keys.

(NELL walks out of her space and to a podium. She speaks to the students/ Greek Chorus, applauding politely.)

NELL: Thank you for that kind welcome. Students, your Teacher has shown how much she supports you by inviting me to speak to you today. It's my hope that we might clear up some difficulty you may be

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experiencing as a result of losing one of your friends, Kevin, to suicide.

(Various students show reactions.)

You are probably either feeling shocked emptiness, or maybe you've got lots of questions. Let's go ahead and see what kind of questions you might have that could lead us into some good discussions in our break-out sessions.

(Pointing to Greek Chorus #2 with hand raised.)

Yes?

GC#2: That, um, "shocked emptiness?" You mean like you feel numb?

(NELL nods.)

So when does that stop and you really know what you're feeling?

NELL: Very good question. It takes a while. Everyone has his or her own rate of recovery. Meeting and discussing like we'll be doing, kind of speeds the recovery. Does that help?

(GC#2 shrugs and sits. NELL points to GC#6 whose hand is raised.)

GC#6: Why did he do it? It seems so stupid. He had talent. His music and band were really starting to get a good reputation.

NELL: Okay, "why" is not as simple a question as it sounds. We're investigating his medical background. There are almost as many different reasons for suicide as there are suicides.

GC#7: That doesn't really answer her question, does it? Why do you think Kevin did it? You're the expert here.

TEACHER: We have to be careful about labeling behavior of people in our community. Kevin's family has to feel comfortable in their own community. Knowing we're discussing Kevin specifically could make them uncomfortable.

GC#8: You mean you don't want to leave yourself open to a lawsuit?

NELL: We look at a suicide victim's medical history to check for illnesses that could mimic mood disorders.

We investigate whether there might have been an undiagnosed mood disorder or mental illness.

GC#9: So you're saying the fact that Kevin wrote a song for the person he thought was his girlfriend and when he sang it for her, she was dancing with another guy...that didn't push Kevin over the edge?

(GC#5 "Sally" gets up, sobbing and runs from the stage.)

NELL: If there's a mood disorder, that certainly could be a contributing factor to the person's sense of "overload." But the girl wouldn't be guilty or to blame.

(Pointing to the girl/Sally who ran out)

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Perhaps that young woman needs to know that.

(Various reactions among the KIDS; the TEACHER runs out as though to tell her what Nell just told them. GC#5 and TEACHER return during the next speech.)

If you know more about depression and bipolarism, you could be instrumental in preventing someone from taking his or her life. Hopefully today you'll learn what some of the cues are in some one's behavior...or your own...that signal a call for help. And this is so important for you to know: help is available. Kevin's choice to take his life was most unfortunate. If you or someone you know cannot seem to get over a negative experience or a loss of something or someone...that's a cue that you or they need help.

GC#8: "Take" his life. That's what you keep saying, that he "took" his life like he was stealing something.

NELL: You could say that, yes, he was stealing something. He meant a lot to all of you and he's taken himself away from you. You've been robbed of a friend and left with sadness. It is a violation.

GC#8: Whatever.

NELL: No, you have something to say. Say it.

GC#8: Well, yeah. I mean you do stuff when you think your life sucks. See, my life sucks. He thought his did, too, I guess. He said, "No thanks, I'll pass."

(Some of the KIDS are irritated at #8; #8 reacts to their nasty looks and stands)

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See, I'm gay.

(KIDS squirm now and make vocal responses like: Sit down; not now; yeah, I'd say your life sucks.)

...I'm gay and I feel like I've had my life taken from me the way Kevin took his life from us. Do you know what I mean?

NELL: You feel violated.

GC#8: Yes. I can't be or look like who I know I really am because nobody wants me that way. They've taken my life and left me with...like...wrapping paper. I look in the mirror and can't find me anymore. You know?

NELL: The Gay/Lesbian experience is a huge issue, deserving attention. I do understand that being unaccepted by various groups in society can hurt and cause pain which brings me to the main point I want to make: suicide is usually a choice not to end life, but to end pain. It's a permanent solution to a temporary problem.

(Beat)

Okay, so let's break out into groups for our discussion session. We'll give each group a topic or question.

(As the TEACHER counts them out and divides them into groups, KIDS walk to their places with attitude. When KIDS finish they are in a freeze frame and NELL walks among them.)

The pain in that high school auditorium was so heavy, I felt crushed just being there. As I looked at each face, I suddenly sensed how inadequate my message was. I realized I didn't really understand, yet, this crime...this criminal act called suicide.

(Lights fade on NELL and come up on 1ST GROUP: GC#8,9,10,11.)

GC#9: Why didn't they just give us flyers to read? I hate this "let's get together and figure out what drove Kevin crazy cause you don't want it to happen to you."

GC#10: I agree. This kind of forum just gives some freaks an arena.

GC#8: You're criticizing me, right?

GC#11: Sweetheart, maybe you're not so stupid afterall.

(1ST GROUP continues discussion, but in pantomime as lights come up on 2ND GROUP: GC#12, GC#1, LILY, GRADY.)

GC#12: What's our discussion topic?

GC#1: It's a question: "How many times have you moved in your life?"

LILY: What? How stupid is that. That's supposed to have something to do with suicide? Phhht!

GRADY: Yeah. It could. I've moved 14 times.

GC#2: Moving would make anyone want to commit suicide? Please!

GC#1: Why'd you move so much, if you don't mind my asking.

GRADY: My Dad...um, he...I'm a military brat.

LILY: Oh man, you are a brat. Listen to that whining. Phht!

GC#1: I've never lived anywhere but here. Gets boring.

GRADY: I'd...I'd kill to live one place long enough to get bored.

GC#12: *(to Grady)* Where have you lived that's way better than here?

GRADY: Every place is the same. They all suck.

LILY: You know what? You are really getting on my nerves with that whining. Are we supposed to feel sorry for you, or what?

GRADY: No.

LILY: I moved, too. One time. One time only. That was 2 months ago. I moved from the only home I've known for seventeen years to this place.

GC#12: If you liked it so much where you were, why'd you move?

LILY: My mom remarried.

GC#1: Been there, done that. My parents are divorced, too.

LILY: Mine aren't. My dad is dead.

GRADY: Mine, too. He was Army. Got killed in the middle east.

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GC#12: I am so sorry.

GC#1: Really.

GRADY: *(to Lily)* What about your dad?

(LILY's eyes fill and she runs from the stage and NELL follows her. The TEACHER steps up to the podium to ask...)

TEACHER: How are we coming along with our discussions? Anyone not understand your topic or question?

(Some members of the GREEK CHORUS hold up their topic papers, looking confused;

OTHERS mumble to each other, improvising lines such as...)

GREEK CHORUS: *(variously)* We're confused. What's the point? Is it almost lunchtime? This stuff gets me down. None of this is going to bring Kevin back.

TEACHER: Relax. Easy does it. This is just a starting place. We'll be answering these questions in a series of meetings over the next several weeks. The point is: you are going to learn to recognize when you or someone you care about is in trouble and needs help. And you'll be empowered by learning ways to get help.

(STUDENTS look at each other and shrug and mumble that maybe it's not such a bad thing after all. They become more concerned with their "topics" and "questions.")

TEACHER: Why don't you each stand and read what you've got and it'll be like a preview of sessions to come.

(TEACHER points to GC#1 and then 2, etc. They each stand and stay standing as they read their questions.)

GC#1: Do you know someone who's taken his own life?

GC#2: How many times has your family moved??

GC#3: Why is moving to a new school so hard?

GC#4: Can suicide be prevented?

GC#5: Can you define depression?

GC#6: What can cause a melt-down or depression?

GC#7: How is depression linked with suicide?

GC#8: Grief, sadness, depression. What's the difference?

GC#9: Depression and hopelessness? What's the difference there?

GC#10: "Bipolarism." What the heck is that?

GC#11: When someone mentions suicide, what can you do?

GC#12: Do you have someone that you can talk to...confidentially?

GREEK CHORUS: Confidentially? Confidentially?

(Moving and asking each other.)

Confidentially? Confidentially.

(Out front loud and clear.)

CONFIDENTIALLY.

(Momentary freeze frame. NELL and LILY re-entered just as the GREEK CHORUS finishes, then exits as they ALL try to find someone to talk to with improvised conversations. NELL and the TEACHER also exit. LILT stands off to the side and GRADY approaches her.)

GRADY: *(to Lily)* You okay?

LILY: Go away.

GRADY: *(turning to leave)* Okay.

LILY: No. Wait.

(GRADY turns back.)

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I'm part volcano. According to my Mom. I volcanoed on you.

GRADY: Well, you were right. I do whine. My Mother says that. These days I whine at just about everyone.

BOTH: Sorry.

LILY: So what was your Father doing in the middle east?

GRADY: *(bravado)* Defending freedom. Sounds good, doesn't it. I actually think he was trying to get killed.

LILY: Why do you say that?

GRADY: *(shrugs)* You know these things.

LILY: Maybe...I don't know...maybe you ought to talk to someone.

(GRADY looks sadly at her)

That shrink? She's pretty nice. She said she was leaving her card on the podium. I'm gonna get one.

(LILY walks by the podium and picks up a card, then another and hands it to Grady. As LILY works her way to Nell's, she keeps holding the business card up to Grady as if to say, "Just do it." GRADY exits. LILY walks to NELL at Nell's office area and sits on the bench. NELL speaks out front to her own counselor.)

NELL: Working with Lily was like hitting an oasis. Her honesty and her search for truth were without any of

the justifications we learn to use as we grow older.

(LILY holds her picture frame as though she and NELL are in the middle of conversation.)

LILY: See. That's my Dad. Everyone says I look a whole lot like him the older I get.

NELL: I can see that. He was handsome. And you are a beautiful young woman. You must be glad to have inherited those genes.

LILY: I am. I really am.

(Looking around.)

Where are pictures of your family?

NELL: When I'm in here, this space is about you. Not me or my family.

LILY: That's cool. So I should keep talking?

NELL: If you want to.

LILY: I always am talking. Ask anyone.

(Points to picture.)

Except when it's about him, ya know? And I don't talk about him much cause it always makes me... What kind of man would do that? Kill himself? The week before his baby is born?

(Cries.)

Didn't he want to see me? What kind of man...

(Can't continue.)

NELL: A very sick man would do that, Lily. People who take their lives are almost always depressives.

LILY: I could have kept him from being depressed. We could have had fun. Why didn't he think of that?

NELL: Depressives usually don't think with their intellects, they act on their worn-down emotions.

(Off Lily's questioning look)

Depressives are people who have a difficult time living life.

LILY: What? Like they miss the whole point of being alive? See, I think life's a big, frigging party...

NELL: Good.

LILY: I'm almost always happy. Until I start thinking about him.

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NELL: So, in fact, most of the time you like your life.

LILY: Well, yeah. I'm not gonna overdose on drugs.

NELL: Is that what your Father did?

LILY: *(nods)* My Mom doesn't come out and say he was a junkie, but I get the picture. Dr. Hennessey, what are chances...?

NELL: That you'll be like your Father...especially since you look so much like him?

(LILY nods.)

You're smart to consider it and you're smart to get some counseling. You'll probably have to be more careful than someone who's not got any addictive behavior in their family...

LILY: Come on. Do you really think there is any family in America without addictive behavior? Aren't shopping and sex addictions?

NELL: They can be. But when drugs have been a problem with one of your parents you've really got to...be

careful. Get yourself some friends who don't mess with any of that.

LILY: Oh hello...that kind of teenager exists? I'm new at my school and if I hear about a party and say I can bring some "good stuff"...I tell you what: I'll have invitations for the rest of my high school career. Friends for the rest of my life. You know what I'm saying?

NELL: Yeah. Sounds tough out there. Do your parents go to any church?

LILY: My step Father wants us to, but my Mom's still pretty down on God cause-o' my Dad and all. He really messed her up big time.

NELL: Understandable. Most of the churches in this community have very active youth groups. A huge number of kids...

LILY: Do you go to church? In your line of work, I bet you could use that kind of help.

NELL: *(to AUDIENCE/COUNSELOR)* I hadn't set foot in a church since my brother's funeral. I used to pray for God to tell me how to help my brother and those who found life so hard. I'd listen for guidance. For wisdom.

(Looks at Lily and then back out front.)

How surprising to find the kind of wisdom I was looking for coming from a teenager.

LILY: For some reason the idea of God as a loving Father kinda appeals to me. I mean I've had to have some one, right?

NELL: Maybe that's where you get your strength.

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(looking at her watch.)

Why not next time we discuss various groups you might think about joining at school? Or at a church, hmmm?

LILY: *(standing, getting ready to leave)* I forgot to tell you: I've been hanging out with the PALS...Peer Assistance Leadership for Students like you suggested that day at school. They're not as goody-goody as I thought they'd be. Actually I went to them to get help for this one kid, Grady? He's like carrying the weight of the world around, you know? He won't unload to me, to the PALS, to anyone. So I told him he'd best come see you.

NELL: Thank you so much for the recommendation.

LILY: *(leaving)* He's really cute, too. See you next week.

(As lights change, NELL returns to her office space while GRADY approaches, holding out one of Nell's business cards.)

NELL: *(to AUDIENCE/COUNSELOR)* Grady's Mother was too busy to come in herself, but she set up a series of appointments for Grady.

DORA: *(at doorway with GRADY)* Here's the young man from the high school?

(GRADY enters, sits, DORA exits.)

NELL: *(to AUDIENCE/COUNSELOR)* Grady had an endearing quality about him. And he was deceptively calm.

(She turns to Grady who grins and shrugs.)

Grady told me the whole story about his Father being killed. He told the whole story again, word for word,

PERUSAL SCRIPT -- LIFELINES by Sheila Lynch Rinear

exactly the same way three times during that first visit. It was as if he'd memorized a script.

GRADY: ...and so my Mom says there's nothing we can do but pray for his soul; that he died to give another nation liberty and that we should be proud of him. I go to the cemetery every week to watch Mom tell Dad she's proud of him.

NELL: (to AUDIENCE/COUNSELOR) But then he slipped.

GRADY: I let Mom think he died for a noble cause, but I know better.

NELL: What is it that you know, Grady?

GRADY: Sure he ran into enemy fire to save his men, but it was suicide.

NELL: Why would he have taken his life?

GRADY: Cause he was so mad and disappointed with me.

NELL: Why would you think that?

GRADY: Cause of something I did...I mean, didn't do, when he left.

(Beat)

A...a misunderstanding.

NELL: Do you want to talk about it.

GRADY: (getting up as if to leave) No, I don't want to talk about it.

NELL: You sound angry...about whatever it was.

GRADY: (withdrawing; almost apologetic) No. I never get angry.

NELL: It would be okay, you know.

GRADY: Waste of time. My dad was always angry and it never helped a damned...I mean, darned thing. Sorry.

NELL: You do that, you know.

GRADY: What?

NELL: That way you talk. It's like you're saying, "You're right. You win. I lose. Sorry. You know better than me?"

GRADY: You're right. I do that. I'm sorry.

(NELL looks at Grady, showing her best "Dr. Phil" glare of "I rest my case." GRADY grins at the irony and shrugs.)

NELL: You said your Father was always angry. Why do you think he was angry?

GRADY: It's like his life, my Dad's life, never went "his" way.

NELL: What do you mean?

GRADY: Someone'd bad-mouth him to a superior. Or, someone else'd get credit for stuff he had done. So his solution to everything was: he'd apply for another position in the Army where things might "go his way" and we'd move.

NELL: It's hard to feel like part of the community that way, huh? When you're moving all the time?

(GRADY nods.)

And I'm very sure it's hard to make and keep friends that way, too.

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GRADY: Dad never liked any of the friends I brought home. Said they were losers. And I wasn't?

NELL: Did that make you angry? That he didn't approve of your choice of friends?

GRADY: No. Just proved that, like with everything else, I was wrong. I always figured me having friends didn't fit into Dad's great plan for the perfect life for his family.

NELL: That's absurd. All fathers want their kids to have friends.

GRADY: Not my Dad. He used to say the kids I tried to hang with would probably do drugs and stuff. "Family first and you'll never get hurt" was one of his mottoes for the perfect life.

NELL: But he never found that perfect life.

(GRADY shakes his head.)

Why do you think things didn't go the way your Father wanted them to go?

GRADY: Like the perfect Disney family? The family that doesn't even know x-rated movies, sex, drugs, and violence exist? The family that goes to church every Sunday? I mean we tried all that stuff.

(Sad)

Why didn't things work out for our family?

NELL: Now that you've got some distance from it, do you think you might be able to look at your Dad's behavior and realize it wasn't necessarily...healthy? For you or him or your Mother?

GRADY: Wouldn't that be kinda disrespectful? Dad worked hard for what he wanted. You gotta admire that. Dad always liked stuff neat...orderly...no mess. He thought the perfect life was out there...somewhere. He was just looking for it.

NELL: *(to AUDIENCE/COUNSELOR)* Amazing. He saw his Father's insubordination, workaholism, depression and hopelessness as admirable qualities. Grady saw his Father as the classic hero on an odyssey.

(To GRADY)

We all need heroes.

GRADY: Who's yours?

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NELL: *(to AUDIENCE/COUNSELOR)* I heard myself confess...

(To GRADY)

...my Brother was my hero.

(to AUDIENCE/COUNSELOR)

I got Grady on medication for his depression. Those medications are tough to get used to sometimes. I noticed a different mood his next visit.

(She turns to GRADY)

GRADY: The medicine you put me on makes me tired all the time.

NELL: Unfortunately that sometimes happens until your body adjusts.

GRADY: Until I get used to being a zombie?

NELL: There are some positives, aren't there?

GRADY: Like?

NELL: Like, have you noticed: does it make you think a little bit differently? Are you at all aware of your thinking being a little less gloomy?

GRADY: Yeah, instead of whining all the time, I find myself wondering which would be easier: cutting my wrists or finding a rope. Relax, I'm kidding. Just kidding, okay?

NELL: (to AUDIENCE/COUNSELOR) He wasn't kidding. His thinking had changed. It frightened me.

(To GRADY)

Surely you're not serious about considering taking your life? Aren't you the one who is so mad because you think your Father took his life?

GRADY: Me? Mad? I don't think so.

NELL: Now you really sound angry. And that's good.

GRADY: I told you I don't get angry. It's a non-productive feeling.

NELL: Your Father used to say that?

(GRADY shrugs.)

You said your Dad always put family first. Can you do that? Like plan fun stuff for you and your Mom to do together?

GRADY: Oh boy. Like watch Netflix together and eat popcorn or brownies fresh from the oven?

NELL: Something like that. Yes.

GRADY: Mom works nights and weekends. Then she doesn't have to be around me.

NELL: Did she tell you that?

GRADY: She didn't have to. Sometimes you just know these things.

NELL: Maybe we could strategize about this.

GRADY: Why bother?

NELL: Give me a call if you need to, okay? If you need to know that somebody cares, cause I do. Your Mom is doing the best she can, but she misses your Father, too. It's hard to reach out when you're surrounded by sadness.

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(GRADY turns and looks at her, deeply asking if she's serious.)

NELL: You can trust me, Grady. I do care what happens to you.

(GRADY turns so she won't see his eyes filled up. He gets up to leave.)

(to AUDIENCE/COUNSELOR)

We all need to know that somebody cares about us.

(NELL takes out her cell phone and speed dials. Meanwhile DORA pantomimes rescheduling Grady, who asks for a notepad to write on. GRADY sits and writes.)

NELL: Michael, just me, Nell, touching base. Thought maybe we could take in a movie or something? Share some popcorn, or brownies...fresh from the oven? Give me a call when you get a chance, okay? Thanks. Bye.

(DORA hears NELL on the phone and enters her space.)

DORA: Boss, Michael called earlier today to say he'll catch up with you in a week or so. Left for the cruise.

NELL: Oh. Wow.

DORA: Yeah, wow. The cruise he wanted you to go on with him?

NELL: You know me. I hate to lose sight of land.

DORA: All I know is it's Friday and you're scheduled for having all next week off.

NELL: Yeah, that's right. I'll have to contact my patients and tell them.

DORA: I've already rescheduled them. You pay me for such services, remember? Hey, you want me to go with you to the coast and we can finally clear that house out? It's been how many years now, Boss? The view there is so relaxing. Wouldn't you love to have a get-away place?

(Realizing she's said enough for now she points in Grady's direction.)

How is that poor kid doing?

NELL: Good. Don't forget to reschedule him, please.

DORA: I told him you wouldn't be here next week.

(Whispering/pantomiming closing door)

He's writing you a note. Said it's what he would have wanted to tell you next week. So he's improving?

NELL: I think he's almost ready to get angry.

DORA: *(leaving)* I'll light a candle for his breakthrough. It'd be a nice change from the whining, huh?

NELL: People whine, I think, because they don't have the energy to get angry. Dora, do I whine?

DORA: *(teasing)* Now that you mention it.

NELL: *(tossing something at Dora and whines in fun)* Leave me alone!

(DORA exits. NELL speaks out front to AUDIENCE/COUNSELOR.)

I am losing my energy. I don't want to go anywhere. I don't want to do anything.

(Beat.)

I never used to get sucked into that black hole of negativity. Why can't I get out of it? Life used to be almost too wonderful to stand sometimes. I'd wake up in the morning and almost trip over the sheets scrambling to get out of bed and get to the day. To my life.

(Beat.)

Where did that go...that "joie de vivre?" I used to wear it like armor and a shield.

(Near tears.)

Why can't I get that back?

(As she speaks, the song 'Starry, Starry Night' by Don McClean comes up softly.)

I've been listening to that song again. I think my brother was an even more amazing artist than Van Gogh ever was. I used to wish the art critiques would recognize that, too. At his place, after his surgery, I kept house for him. He'd just had a piece of his sculpture rejected by a museum. He was counting on the money he'd have gotten from that to pay his bills.

(Reads from a book)

"The act of suicide, in itself, is usually the response to something that was probably the last in a chain of losses or disappointments for the victim. Suicide is never a rational decision." But he left me that note...when he went to the beach that day.

(Reaches to retrieve the note that's inside a book)

It sounded rational, like he was handling his disappointment in his usual, poetic way.

(Reads it at the same time DORA reads Grady's note)

"I'm sorry to be taking you away from your classes and studies. Why don't you get on back to your life? Don't worry about me, Nelly. I'm not up to riding the waves so I'll just go with the flow." I should have sensed the pain in his note. But no, I was too busy studying about how to help others and I missed my cue to help my own Brother.

PERUSAL SCRIPT -- LIFELINES by *Sheila Lynch Rinear*

(DORA enters with with urgency, holding Grady's note out to NELL.)

DORA: Here's the note Grady wrote for you. I think you'd better read it.

NELL: Thanks.

(Takes it and reads it; jumps up and reads aloud)

"Doctor Hennessey, I wanted you to know why my Dad took his life. He did it because he was so mad at me. See, I stayed in my room and wouldn't go to the airport with him and Mom the day he left for the middle east. I was so stupid doing that just cause he was going somewhere without us. And I yelled at him saying he shouldn't leave us and that I'd kill myself if anything happened to him. Anyways, thought you'd like to know that. Have a good vacation..." Dora.

(DORA nods)

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He sounds desperate, doesn't he?

NELL: Yes. And not terribly rational. But we can be, need to be rational for him. Get me his address. Quick.

DORA: You're going to his house?

NELL: Yes I am. Then we're taking him to the treatment center. I'll not miss my cue this time.

(The music comes up and we hear:

"Now I think I know what you tried to say to me

How you suffered for your sanity, etc...

Lights fade.)

END OF ACT ONE

14 more pages in act 2 of the script