

Mr. Brightside

INT. DAY - BEDROOM - ORDINARY SUBURBAN HOME

SHOT ON: MASTER BEDROOM

The Schwanghammer home is upper middle class; comfortable, but not affluent.

Radio plays in the background. It is tuned to the A.M. talk radio station where GERRY works.

Two suitcases on the queen-sized bed, both are open, both are half-filled with clothes. Other clothes lie on the bed ready to be packed.

SHOT ON: YELLOW LEGAL PAD BY ONE OF THE SUITCASES

Writing on the legal pad is written in tidy, female handwriting: *Sorrowful Dove Funeral Home*.

A radio in the background drones with a laconic male voice reporting local events:

RADIO VOICE

Euclid Avenue will be the place to be this weekend -- Mrs. Smith is having a yard sale.

(bored pause; seems almost to sigh)

The Sanitation Supervisor reminds citizens that yard waste pick up is this Saturday.

(seeming to lose his place)

Bosco the mixed terrier from Rundstedtler Avenue is still missing...

GERRY stands before the small, found mirror on top of his dresser.

SHOT ON: GERRY FROM P.O.V. OF THE MIRROR

GERRY fixes his hair -- which is already perfect -- with meticulous care.

GERRY

(gloating; almost singing)
Oh, Ronald, gotcha now. You don't do the news if you can't pronounce the names of newsmakers.

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GRACE

(enters from the en suite
bath. She's annoyed)
Don't we have bigger things to worry
about? Or isn't Dad dying headline news
to you?

GERRY

(steps away from the mirror,
takes GRACE in his arms)
Hey, we're all upset about losing Dad.
He had a good life. We should all be so
lucky to have a life like his.

GRACE

(horrified)
Lucky?! He had a heart attack and fell
down the stairs!

GERRY

(pulls her close)
I mean, to live as long as he did.

GRACE

(shrugs out of GERRY's
embrace; resumes packing)
And Mother's all alone in that house.
She can't cook for herself. She proba-
bly thinks I'm going to move in, but
how can I--?

GERRY

(puts his hands on
GRACE's shoulders)
Slow down. Carolyn lives in Brickshire,
she can check on Mom. And if Mom really
can't handle the house, she can come
here.

GRACE

(turns, aghast)
Are you out of your mind?

GERRY

(impatient)
What do you want? -- Mom burning down
the house trying to make a grilled
cheese? She's your mother. Of course
she'll live with us if it's too much
for Carolyn looking in on her.

GRACE

I can't teach piano with her wandering

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all over, picking and picking at the house, burning things on the stove, setting the smoke alarm off--?

GERRY
(becoming the
Voice of Reason)
You're getting way, way ahead of yourself.

The sound of a honking bicycle horn comes from the hallway outside of the master bedroom, followed by the muffled voices of ANDY and ABIGAIL arguing.

ABIGAIL
(heard through her
parents' bedroom door)
Will you cut it out already?! I don't care if you can't fit your rubber fish in your suitcase! It's not going in mine!

ANDY
(doing a very poor
Humphrey Bogart impression)
Come on, sweetheart, what's a man without his rubber fish?

ABIGAIL
You're not a man!

ANDY
(in his normal
speaking voice;
urgent, exasperated)
Ah, come on! How many tampons you gotta pack, anyhow?

ABIGAIL
(shouts)
Mom!

FADE IN:

EXT. DAY - DRIVEWAY OF ORDINARY SUBURBAN HOME

The exterior of the home is a pleasant-looking, nondescript split level ranch on a quiet, nondescript street filled with split-level homes. There is a wood-craft sign below the house's address that reads: THE SCHWANGHAMMERS.

There should be a status-symbol sport utility vehicle in the driveway, like all the other homes have, but there is not. In the Schwanghammer driveway is a small, dirty black car resting on a slant--in place of its front left tire is a "donut" spare.

ANDY and GERRY load the suitcases into the trunk of the car. Three of the four cases barely fit.

GERRY puts his weight into mashing the third suitcase into the trunk, but the door won't shut all the way. He secures it with a bungee cord.

GERRY and ANDY heft the fourth suitcase onto the roof of the car, tying it in place with a length of rope

GERRY finds in the near corner of the garage.

GERRY
(stands back, hands
on hips, pleased
with his improvisation)
Necessity is the mother of invention.

ANDY
(doing a very poor
Groucho Marx impression)
Sometimes necessity is just a mother!

GERRY
(momentarily serious)
Don't let your mother hear you talk
like that!

ANDY
Cool it, Dad, I was just working blue.
Gotta give the people what they want,
leave 'em laughing, break a leg, bust
'em up--

ABIGAIL
(coming out of the
house with her mother)
How about shutting up?

ANDY
(feigning great offense)
Hey buddy! Save your breath for your
inflatable date!

GRACE

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(coming up just
behind ABIGAIL)
Hey! What kind of talk is that?

ANDY
(smiling sheepishly)
Just working blue, Mom. Just working
blue.

ANDY and ABIGAIL squeeze into the backseat of the
two-door car.

GRACE
(standing next to her
husband, surveying the
shabby black car with
open disgust)
Will this thing even get us around the
block?

GERRY
(defensive)
The guy at the shop said it's not much
to look at, but it's as reliable as a
Lear Jet.

GRACE
(holding out her hand,
expecting GERRY to hand
over the car keys)
Yeah, well, whatever.

GERRY
(looking at his
wife's outstretched hand)
Uh, yeah?

GRACE
(exasperated)
The keys, Gerhard, I'm waiting for the
keys to the car, so that I can start
the car, and drive the car. I can't do
any of that until you give me the G.D.
keys!

GERRY
(wounded)
Hon, I'll drive.

GRACE
(eyes widening)
Uh, no, you managed to wrap our SUV
around a lamp post because you can't

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leave the radio controls alone.

GERRY
(trying to be
the Voice of Reason)
But Hon, you're the Navigator. I can't
read the map on the road. I get motion
sickness.

GRACE
(lowering her
outstretched hand)
If you go one mile an hour over the
speed limit I'm taking the wheel.

GERRY
(smiling)
We're a team!
(pecks her on the cheek)
I'll drive like I'm taking you to the
hospital to have one of the kids.

GRACE fixies GERRY with a sharp, startled glance.

GERRY
(understanding some
unspoken rebuke)
Right, well, I mean, I'll drive safe.

INT. DAY - SHABBY BLACK CAR, CONSTRICTED INTERIOR

The family is on the road. The car radio is tuned
to the same A.M. radio station GERRY was listening
to in the bedroom. The volume is low enough that
the audience cannot make out what's being said.

GERRY
(singing to himself)
Ronald, Ronald, Bo Bonald
Bonana, Fanna, Fo Fonald
Fee, Fy, Mo Monald
Ronald!

GRACE
You're incessant.

GERRY
(smiling, keeping his
eyes on the road)
And Ron's finished.

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GRACE
One flub ends Ron's career?

GERRY
One flub? He mispronounced Councilman
Kleinhelmschmitz's name as "Klein-
helmshitz."

ABIGAIL
Bram says his dad knew his youth was
over the day he started listening to
talk radio.

GERRY
(frowning, looking at ABIGAIL
in the rear view mirror)
That's a helluva thing to say! You need
a new boyfriend.

ANDY
Jibber jabber!

ABIGAIL
(looks at her brother
with venomous eyes)
Will you shut up?!

GRACE
ABIGAIL!

ABIGAIL
He won't stop!

ANDY
(grinning maniacally
at his sister)
Jibber jabber! Jibber jabber!

GRACE
(impatient, turning
to look at ANDY)
What's that mean?

ANDY
It's my catch-phrase. All the kids'll
be saying it.

GERRY
Say "Kleinhelmschmitz" fives times
fast.

ANDY
(doing a very poor

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Winston Churchill)
I am not a trained monkey, sir.

ABIGAIL
(wide-eyed, exasperated)
You spent thirty dollars on a rubber
fish! You're not even a trained monkey!

GRACE
(shouts)
Doesn't anyone give a shit that
GRANDPA's dead?
(begins to cry)

GERRY
(glancing at her, concerned)
Hon?

ABIGAIL/ANDY
(in unintended unison)
Sorry Mom.

GRACE
(pulls tissue from her
purse, dabs her eyes)
You're acting like we're going to the
mall.

GERRY
(patting GRACE's knee)
You should just ease your seat back and
rest your eyes.

GRACE
(straightening up in her
seat, speaking with a
distinct edge in her voice)
I'm just disappointed everyone's taking
this so lightly.

In the backseat ANDY is replaced by GRANDPA. This
is a fantasy sequence in which GRANDPA addresses
the camera. No one in the car reacts to his pres-
ence. He is invisible to them.

GRANDPA
(addressing the camera)
That was always the First Deadly Sin
with GRACE and her mother -- taking
things "too lightly."

GRANDPA
(grunts to himself,
looks out the window)

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Acting like death is some unforeseen event.

(looks back at the camera)
I'm not saying it's not a shock when somebody close to you dies, but so far Nature's batting average with death is a thousand.

(shakes his head)
You ever listen to how people talk? Hearing them say, "If I die..." If? You're either pretty damned confident or pretty damned ignorant to be thinking like that.

(waves a dismissive hand)
Most people are neither. They just don't think.

Camera pans to the front seat, narrows on GRACE who switches the radio station and turns up the volume. GRANDPA, unnoticed, disappears from the backseat and ANDY is again in his place next to his sister.

RADIO: an advertisement backed with classical piano music comes on.

COMMERCIAL VOICE

Classical piano's elegant sensation is coming to the Gastonia Music Theatre for a night of unforgettable music! Susan Strasberg (at the mention of that name, GRACE gapes, stunned, and stares at the radio) has enthralled audiences around the world with her virtuoso's touch, the soaring beauty of her musical magic, with her gorgeous melodies. Tickets are now on sale!

GRACE
(switches off the radio;
speaks to no one
in particular)
Are you kidding?
(louder, harried)
Are you kidding me?!

GERRY
What's that? The Susan Strasberg concert?
(smiles)
I was going to surprise you with tick-

ets.

GRACE
(regards her husband with
wide, shocked eyes,
voice going shrill)
Are you joking?

GERRY
(misunderstanding her shock
for "good" shock; his grin widens)
Yeah! Nothing's too good for my Hon! I
get a discount through the station.

GRACE
Tickets? Goddamn it, for Susan Stras-
berg?

GERRY
(smile falters)
Yeah, I thought--

GRACE
(voice rising to a shout)
Susan fucking Strasberg?!

GERRY
(shocked)
Honey--?!

ANDY
Mom's working blue!

ABIGAIL
(slapping her brother's arm)
Shut up!

GRACE
Susan Strasberg is the bane of my exis-
tence!

GERRY
What the hell are you talking about?

GRACE
I did my music degree with that cow.
She was a giggling, brainless hack who
only got in because her parents were so
Goddamned rich!

GERRY
Well, who cares how she got in? What'd
she ever do to you?

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GRACE

(eyes widening,
voice shrill)

We roomed together for a semester. She nearly drove me out of my mind. Her influences were Georgie Fame, John Tesh, and Zamfir-

GERRY

(cutting her off)

We should top up the tank before hitting the highway.

They soon come upon a Winks convenience store/gas bar.

GERRY gets out of the car just as a lethargic, lazy twenty-nothing guy comes out to pump the gas.

GAS STATION ATTENDANT

(squinting beneath his
filthy baseball cap)

Yeah?

GERRY

(flustered)

Uh, fill it up with Regular.

GAS STATION ATTENDANT

(shuffling over to
the gas pumps)

Sure.

GRACE gets out of the car and walks across the small parking lot. The GAS STATION ATTENDANT ogles her openly. She crosses her arms and hugs herself.

GERRY approaches.

GERRY

(a few steps behind GRACE)

Hon, are you OK?

GRACE

(doesn't turn to face him)

I'm fine. Just a little... disappointed that Dad dying doesn't mean a little more to you and the kids.

GERRY

(impatient)

We loved Dad, you know that.
(steps into her field of vision)

What's all the freaking out about Susan Strasberg?

GRACE

(sighs)

Jesus, GERRY, what do you think? That should be me playing the Gastonia Music Theatre.

(glances back at the car
as though worried the kids
might hear her)

If I hadn't gotten pregnant with ABIGAIL, you know I would be.

GERRY

You're not the only one who's sacrificed for the family.

GRACE

Well, I've sacrificed the most.

GERRY

I didn't know it was a competition.

GRACE

(her anger losing steam)

It's not. But just hearing that name again.

(shakes her head)

I thought I'd be satisfied--

(stops as the GAS STATION
ATTENDANT approaches)

GAS STATION ATTENDANT

(leering at GRACE,
but speaking to GERRY)

Fill-up's thirty-two bucks.

GERRY

(fumbles out his wallet
and hands over the money)

Thanks.

(GERRY and GRACE start
walking back to the car)

GAS STATION ATTENDANT

(smiling his leering grin)

You have a nice day.

(looks at GRACE, touches
the bill of his filthy cap)
Ma'am.