

EXT FOREST LAWN CEMETERY - DAY

The early morning sun is slowly lifting the dew. The LA sky has never been bluer. A large group of well-healed mourners is gathered around a beautiful rich casket heaped with bright flowers.

PASTOR

(Reading from notes)

Barbara will be remembered most by her millions of fans for the joy she brought them. Through her pain and sorrow, she always maintained a cheerful countenance. She felt it was her duty to keep smiling, even in the face of adversity. When things looked their most bleak, she could always be counted on to turn toward the camera, smile and deliver the line that was to become her trademark, "If you thi..."

(choked up)

"If you... If you think that's bad, you should see the other guy."

He looks up from his notes, confident his well-constructed eulogy has brought a tear to everyone's eye.

ANGLE MOURNERS

And it has.

BARBARA (V.O.)

I'd often been asked, if I had it all to do over again, what would I change? I would just look the person in the eye and say, "Nothing. I wouldn't change a thing..." Even if I could, which I couldn't. You see, that's a trick question. My life was set from the start - entirely out of my control. I had no choice in what was to unfold. But I have no complaints and want nothing more.

EXT. FARMINGTOWN RESIDENTIAL STREET - DAY

TITLE: FARMINGTOWN, NEBRASKA 1936

It looks just like a movie set. Bulbous cars drive by slowly through groups of happy children playing kick the can and riding soapbox cars.

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Women wearing big hats and high heels sashay along. Neighbors nod and smile at neighbors. It's all just a little too much, but then that's Barbara's world.

BARBARA (V.O.)

I was born Barbara Sue Weiner on October 14, 1930. It was the start of the depression. My Daddy was a banker, so we had it better than most, I suspect.

INT WEINER DINING ROOM

DADDY, MAMA, Barbara and BUFORD are arranged perfectly around the supper table. It could be a drained-color photo right out of the Post.

BARBARA (V.O.)

My brother Buford was four years my elder, and I idolized him.

BUFORD

(To Mama)

May I have some more Brussel sprouts, please?

MAMA

You may.

She passes him a heavy bowl.

CHILD BARBARA

Me too!

MAMA

Oh honey, there's only enough for one serving.

CHILD BARBARA

Ah gee.

BUFORD

(Dejected)

Oh scout, you can have mine. That's okay.

CHILD BARBARA

Really, Bufe?

BUFORD

Sure, I ain't that hungry anyway.

CHILD BARBARA

Gee, thanks Bufe.

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BUFORD

You're welcome.

(Handing her the bowl)

I'll just eat what's left of the turkey.

CHILD BARBARA

You will?

BUFORD

(Chuckle)

You want that too, Scout?

CHILD BARBARA

Gosh no Bufe. You gotta eat somethin'.

She watches Bufe pile the rest of the meat on his plate and drizzle gravy all over it, as she jabs her fork in a leathery sprout. (For some reason, no one ever wonders why Barbara is the only one in her family with a Southern accent.)

There's a KNOCK at the door. Mama gets up.

MAMA

I wonder who that could be, calling at supper time?

We FOLLOW her into the...

WEINER ENTRYWAY

We see that their home is a more-than-ample 20's structure with wood-paneled walls and a wide staircase leading to a second, possibly third floor.

RONNY is waiting at the door - short, scrawny, 6 years old, dressed shabbily, holding an inexpensive puppy.

RONNY

Hey, Mrs. Weiner.

MAMA

Hey, Ronny. It's uh... Barbara can't play now.

RONNY

Is she eatin' supper?

MAMA

She... she's tending to some chores now.

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RONNY

Smells like turkey and Brussel sprouts, Mrs. Weiner. You make the best supper. Why, just hearin' your name makes my mouth water.

MAMA

Thank you, Ronny. She can play later-

RONNY

I just want to show her my puppy real quick.

He walks in past her and heads straight for the...

WEINER DINING ROOM

Daddy, Barbara and Buford are looking his way with long faces as he enters and stands facing the table. Buford's cheeks are bulging. Ronny looks over the empty dishes and turkey carcass.

RONNY

Hey Mr. Weiner, Barbara... Buford.

They mumble replies.

RONNY (CONT'D)

I got a new puppy. Pop says if I'm lucky I can keep this one.

Bufe swallows the lump in his mouth whole. It gets stuck halfway and he starts to turn blue. Ronny just stares.

BARBARA (V.O.)

They were hard times. The kind of times that made you think hard and worry deep.

EXT. WEINER FRONT PORCH - EARLY EVENING

The big sky is still lit up deep blue, and the bugs are thick around the porchlight. WE PAN to include Barbara rocking on the porch swing, deep in thought, reading a big book.

Daddy steps out onto the porch and sits next to her. He's a tall, serious man without many lines, but he knows how to make the most of what he has.

DADDY

Wha'cha reading there, Sport?

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CHILD BARBARA
Tale of two cities.

DADDY
Mighty weighty book for a little
girl.

CHILD BARBARA
Oh, it ain't so weighty.

He lights his pipe. Barbara studies him.

CHILD BARBARA (CONT'D)
Daddy?

DADDY
What Sport?

CHILD BARBARA
Daddy, why did Mama tell Ronny
Spurlow that I was doin' chores,
when she knew we was eatin' supper.

DADDY
Well Sport, I reckon she didn't
want to hurt Ronny's feelings. You
see, we're fortunate to have the
money to buy food for supper.
Ronny's family, well... times are
tough.

CHILD BARBARA
Why don't we give them some of
ours?

DADDY
(Smiles)
Well Sport, I don't expect you to
understand quite yet. You will when
you get older.

CHILD BARBARA
Understand what?

DADDY
Well... If we just gave them some
food, it would be like giving them
a handout. Ronny's Daddy would feel
ashamed. It would hurt his dignity.

CHILD BARBARA
That's not what he said.

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DADDY

Oh?

CHILD BARBARA

Mr. Spurlow, he said he'd take anything.

DADDY

Well Sport, he would say that. But he's a proud man. All men are proud. It's sort of an unwritten agreement among men that no matter how much you say you want a handout, you never really want one. You see? He might say he'd take anything, he might even accept anything, but... he will never... want to. And we must never go against a man's deepest wishes.

CHILD BARBARA

I don't-

DADDY

I know, I know. You'll just have to trust me on this one, Sport.

He pats her knee and stands.

DADDY (CONT'D)

Come on now, it's gettin' late.

He holds the door open, as Barbara takes her cue and walks in.

BARBARA (V.O.)

Daddy was like that. It seemed no matter how much he would explain something, there would always be more questions afterward.

INT. CHILD BARBARA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

It's dark and she is lying in bed with her hands behind her head, looking thoughtfully out her second-story window. The black arms of a cottonwood shift slowly in the light breeze.

After a moment, we hear a low HUMMING SOUND and a pulsing red light drifts down into view, shining through the branches from the other side of the tree. Barbara watches it, as it watches her. She shows no sign of fear or surprise - it has come every night for as long as she can remember.

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Then, a greenish light flashes on, flooding Barbara and her room with a beam brighter than the sun. She closes her eyes, as usual. Then, the bright light fades away and the red light floats up and away.

She pulls the covers up and falls asleep.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD MARKET - DAY

The grocer is standing on the sidewalk, arms akimbo, looking up and down the street anxiously. "Agostino's Market, Fresh Fish" is printed on a long sign over the windows running the width of the store. Another postcard shot. Barbara comes skipping by.

CHILD BARBARA
Hey, Mr. Agostino.

MR. AGOSTINO
Hey, Barbara.

We TRACK with Barbara as she cuts through an empty lot next to the store. It's attractive and bucolic, like everything else we see in Farmingtown.

She stops when she notices Ronny crouched behind a bush, holding a shopping bag, eating a slice of bread with his brother Donny.

CHILD BARBARA
Hey fellas, what'cha doin'?

Ronnie grabs her and pulls her down with them.

RONNY
(Hushed)
We're playing a game.

CHILD BARBARA
What kinda game?

RONNY
Shh.

Ronny looks back toward the market.

CHILD BARBARA
What's in the bag?

RONNY
Hey Barbara, remember my puppy?

CHILD BARBARA
Yeah.

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RONNY

You want one too, just like it?

CHILD BARBARA

Sure!

RONNY

Come on.

He checks back one last time, then signals to the two and they run across the lot into the...

FARMINGTOWN WOODS

From a HIGH WIDE ANGLE we watch the trio jump over logs and zigzag through a patch of scraggly trees growing along a stream. Their path follows the stream down to a valley of once-prosperous farms.

EXT. SPURLOW HOUSE - DAY

A sharp contrast to Barbara's place. It's flat, crooked, shabby, littered with broken down trucks, fronted by a lot that has been defoliated by farm animals and hyperactive kids.

Five wild, shoeless children have a small girl tied to a stake, and are doing an Indian dance around her. She doesn't seem too concerned.

The haggard mother is hanging wash on a line. Ronny, Donny and Barbara run past her through the front door.

INT. SPURLOW LIVING ROOM

It's big, bare and dim, with one threadbare rug. The unshaven father is slumped in an easy chair, reading a paper.

MR. SPURLOW

(Shouting, as always)

Hey you kids! Slow down! You're driving me crazy!

They continue running into the...

SPURLOW BACK ROOM

Another big, bare room with several mattresses on the floor. They run to a wood box in the center and look in.

ANGLE INTO BOX

Four little ill-bred puppy faces look up at Barbara with their big, sad eyes. She falls in love.

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CHILD BARBARA
Oh Ronny, they're darling!

RONNY
(Shouting)
Hey Pop! There were six this
morning! What happened?

ANGLE ON RONNY AND BARBARA

Barbara picks one up tenderly. It licks her face.

MR. SPURLOW (O.S.)
If you don't get rid of them damn
dogs, I will! They ain't no good
for target practice or eatin' or
nothin'! You hear me!?

RONNY
You want one, Bar?

CHILD BARBARA
Sure!

MR. SPURLOW (O.S.)
You hear me!?

RONNY
Okay, they're twenty cents apiece.

CHILD BARBARA
Twenty?

RONNY
Ten.

CHILD BARBARA
Ten?

RONNY
I'd give one to you for free,
but...

He looks down and runs a hand across his perpetually runny
nose. Something clicks with Barbara.

CHILD BARBARA
I understand. It would be like a
handout.

RONNY
Yeah.

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CHILD BARBARA
Oh, Bobby, that's so sweet.

He looks at her.

CHILD BARBARA (CONT'D)
You don't want me to be ashamed. I understand.

She reaches into her pocket and pulls out a handful of coins. Ronny's mouth drops.

CHILD BARBARA (CONT'D)
Here's twenty cents.

RONNY
Hell, I'll give you the whole box for thirty.

CHILD BARBARA
I don't want you to give me anything, Ronny. I know about pride.

RONNY
Okay, forty.

CHILD BARBARA
My mama would never allow me to have a whole box of puppies. I only want one. This one. I'm going to name him, Fluffy.

Ronny and Donny look at each other with "gag me" expressions. Barbara doesn't notice. She looks down at the one she is holding and snuggles it.

BARBARA (V.O.)
It was more than my first puppy. It was my first love.

EXT. WEINER BACKYARD - A YEAR LATER

Barbara and Fluffy cavort in the grass. She rolls onto the ground and the dog jumps on her and licks her face. Fluffy has grown into a large and somewhat fearsome black Rottweiler.

BARBARA (V.O.)
We had a bond that ran deeper than the Grand Canyon. I remember my time with Fluffy was filled with such innocent, overwhelming joy.

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BARBARA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I couldn't imagine what people were talking about when they spoke of all the misery brought on by the Depression. What a lot of fuss? I thought the Depression would just go away on its own if everyone had something to love.