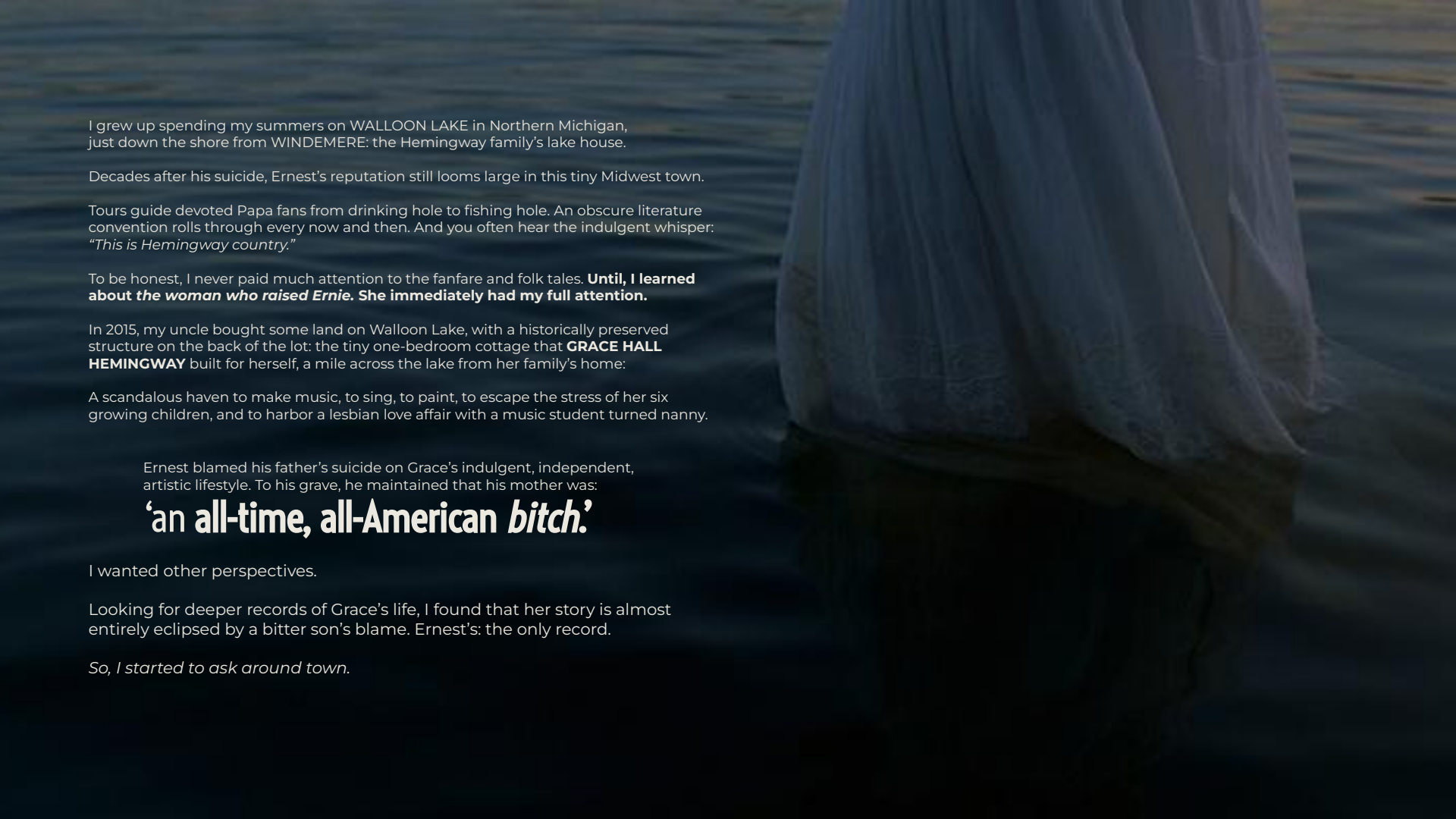


An Operatic revision of America's most public,
misunderstood history of mental health & suicide:

THE HEMINGWAYS

BY MOLLY VIROSTEK



I grew up spending my summers on WALLOON LAKE in Northern Michigan, just down the shore from WINDEMERE: the Hemingway family's lake house.

Decades after his suicide, Ernest's reputation still looms large in this tiny Midwest town.

Tours guide devoted Papa fans from drinking hole to fishing hole. An obscure literature convention rolls through every now and then. And you often hear the indulgent whisper: *"This is Hemingway country."*

To be honest, I never paid much attention to the fanfare and folk tales. **Until, I learned about the woman who raised Ernie. She immediately had my full attention.**

In 2015, my uncle bought some land on Walloon Lake, with a historically preserved structure on the back of the lot: the tiny one-bedroom cottage that **GRACE HALL HEMINGWAY** built for herself, a mile across the lake from her family's home:

A scandalous haven to make music, to sing, to paint, to escape the stress of her six growing children, and to harbor a lesbian love affair with a music student turned nanny.

Ernest blamed his father's suicide on Grace's indulgent, independent, artistic lifestyle. To his grave, he maintained that his mother was:

'an all-time, all-American *bitch*.'

I wanted other perspectives.

Looking for deeper records of Grace's life, I found that her story is almost entirely eclipsed by a bitter son's blame. Ernest's: the only record.

So, I started to ask around town.

INTRODUCTION



In local haunts, where store owners & barbacks dutifully parrot back anecdotes of Ernest's time 'Up North', heads *whipped around* when I mentioned Grace's name.

Their eyes lit up. They poured me a coffee. They pulled up two chairs.

The same phrases came up again and again:

A force of nature!

A genius!

A troublemaker!

An inspiration to all.

An Opera star confined to the golden cage of the Victorian era.

The powerful figure who shaped the famed author, for better or worse.

A misunderstood matriarch.

A woman before her time.

Grace, a professionally trained Opera singer, left behind her dreams and returned to marry Dr. Hemingway in OAK PARK, a Chicago suburb. But she never managed to shrink back into the stifling roles of housewife and mother.

For 7 years, I've looked for the other sides of Grace, beyond Ernest's rigid verdict.

And in my search for other sides of Grace, I also discovered other sides of America's most public, misunderstood history of mental health:

THE HEMINGWAYS.

BEYOND THE “SUICIDE CURSE”:

Too often, Talent and Torment twist together in the lives of great artists. But in *families* of great artistic talent, the line between creativity and mental health gets even messier.

Which side of the sword are you inheriting? Will your passion turn to pain, as it did for relatives who came before you? While the world remembers your grandfather for his genius literary works, does his private struggle and tragic ending not outweigh the rest for you?



Suffering from severe diabetes and concerned about his financial future, DR. CLARENCE HEMINGWAY shot himself on December 6, 1928.



Literary giant ERNEST HEMINGWAY was found dead from a shotgun wound to the head on July 2, 1961, after a long and public struggle with mental health.



Actress & model MARGAUX HEMINGWAY died of suicide by overdose on the 35th anniversary of her grandfather Ernest Hemingway's death.

These were the most publicly documented deaths, but seven other close Hemingway relatives lost their lives to their own mental health battles. Generation after generation, this “suicide curse” marked the family's public image and scarred their private lives.

But this same family also happens to be a tribe of courageous artists – who have used music, writing, acting, and art to carry on.

THE SERIES

A woman in a long, light-colored dress is seated at a grand piano in a grand, ornate room. The room features large windows with heavy, patterned curtains and a large rug. The lighting is warm and dramatic, highlighting the woman and the piano. The overall atmosphere is one of historical elegance and artistic pursuit.

THE HEMINGWAYS follows 4 generations of this iconic family – looking beyond the suicides that eclipsed their legacy, and plunging into the complex lives of the characters left behind.

The Hemingways are part of the American zeitgeist, but, much like our societal conversations around suicide, the dialogue trails of after tragedy. *It's time to explore life after death.*

We will *LIVE* with these characters. A talented, quirky tribe of artists. Funny, witty, fabulous, flawed.

They will use their art (music, writing, acting) to move through a string of unspeakable tragedies. In the public eye, they will carry each other's secrets and defend their family's legacy. In the privacy of crowded kitchens, they will cast bitter blame and fight over how to move forward.

Over **three seasons and four generations**, they will move from a family *keeping their struggle a secret* to a family *sharing their struggle* on a global stage. But if you know anything about healing, this will be a messy, mammoth undertaking.

This is not another macho tale about a novelist you read in sophomore English class. This is a witty family drama teeming with headstrong humans, complex relationships, selfish sacrifices, and elastic love.

A story about the power of art to heal us. And the power of joy to keep the music alive, against all odds.

1 HOUR STREAMER, HISTORICAL DRAMA

STRUCTURE



The power of this generational story lies in the sprawling family dynamic. But, to explore the intimacies & intricacies of mental health, we zoom in on **one unlikely protagonist** each season.

It will never be Ernest Hemingway.

He is always there – a bitter son (S01), an angry father (S02), a legendary late grandfather (S03) – but we've seen his movie before. In this show, Ernest is the smoking gun on the wall.

In this show, we follow mothers, sisters, and daughters who shaped Ernest's early story – or inherited his heavy legacy.

Each season, our protagonist will pursue an artistic ambition of her own. One that is directly impacted by the family's "suicide curse" & evolving relationship to mental health.

Each season, the protagonist will be finding her own voice, while keeping family secrets (from mental health to sexual fluidity). These secrets mount over the seasons, adding extra weight onto the shoulders of the next season's protagonist.

*Each season is a complete personal journey.
But the family's growth arc unfolds over three.*

Our protagonist will never be the one to lose their life to suicide. But they will lose a very important loved one to the struggle. They will have to figure out how to move forward. How to be okay. And when it's okay not to be.

Like both *THE CROWN* and *SUCCESSION*, this series' ongoing drama springs forth from a family legacy that must, somehow, be carried on. A legacy that brings both pride and pain.

SEASON 01:

GRACE



GRACE HALL HEMINGWAY (Ernest's mother) was a promising Opera star who solo debuted in Madison Square Garden with the Metropolitan Opera: *her first and final performance*. Shortly after that sold-out night, Grace returned to Oak Park to marry DR. CLARENCE HEMINGWAY, leaving behind lifelong artistic dreams (and buried sexual desires for her female voice coach).

SEASON 01 meets Grace (48) clinging to her vibrant past, as her 6 kids become teenagers and her husband DR. CLARENCE HEMINGWAY's mental health begins to rapidly decline. Clarence's private admission that he needs help (and will leave for a REST CURE) is a daunting call for Grace to step up in their family – after years of making a mint on her local voice lessons and living as she pleases (socially, financially, sexually).

When Clarence commits suicide in E06, their conservative town (and her son Ernest) will blame Grace and her indulgences for the tragedy. Can she keep her family together, despite the brutal accusations?

SEASON 02:

GLORIA



GLORIA HEMINGWAY (Ernest's youngest child, born GREGORY) was a transgender woman who spent her life struggling to reconcile her childhood ambition of becoming a “Hemingway hero” with own evolving identity – and darkening relationship with her late father.

SEASON 01 meets Gloria moving to California and marrying – against her parent's wishes. In CA, she will be arrested for entering a bar in “drag” the night before her mother (and Ernest's second wife) PAULINE dies of a stress-related condition. Ernest will blame the tragedy Gloria's new lifestyle. Guttled by Pauline's death, Gloria retreats to Africa where she drinks heavily, shoots elephants, and joins the United States Army as a private. When Gloria learns that Ernest and Pauline got into a horrible fight the night before her mother died (likely inducing hypertension), she realizes that her father could be equally blamed for the tragedy.

But where does blame get us? When Ernest commits suicide, Gloria begins to write. She wades through her own mental health battles and starts a memoir about her father, using writing to heal a lifetime of hurt.

SEASON 03:

MARIEL



MARIEL HEMINGWAY (Ernest's granddaughter) was an actress celebrated for her film performances, and remembered for her close relationship to her big sister MARGAUX, who would lose her life to suicide.

SEASON 01 meets Mariel navigating early Hollywood alongside Margaux. The weight of the entertainment industry and their family's legacy falls heavy on their shoulders. Mariel stands by Margaux's side while her older sisters' glittering career dries up, her marriage ends, and a stint in rehab sends the tabloids reeling. When Margaux is found in her Santa Monica apartment (an overdose ruled suicide), Mariel will spend weeks unable to accept it. Was the real killer an inherited gene – or a level of fame that could kill anyone?

As Mariel bravely continues her own film career, grappling with her big sister's death every step of the way, a new purpose emerges. The season (and series) ends at a film premiere, all the cameras on MARIEL: a woman unsatisfied by the glittering stage that so many relatives before her fought for. A woman ready to commit her life to shining a light on suicide – and the marks it leaves on the families left behind.

SO1: GRACE

SEASON OVERVIEW

SEASON 01 meets GRACE HALL HEMINGWAY in OAK PARK, CHICAGO. The promise of a glittering Opera career is decades behind her. Now, she is the unfit mother of six children and the eccentric wife of the town doctor: CLARENCE HEMINGWAY. She gives expensive voice lessons, earning a sizable independent income, and lives as she pleases. But, she's still a Victorian housewife. And pretty lonely. And awfully unfulfilled.

Grace never lets anyone forget what she gave up for this safe, respectable life in suburbia (Fame! Sold out Madison Square Garden nights! The Metropolitan Opera!). But this safe life isn't turning out to be so easy either. Her kids are becoming unruly teenagers and her husband's mental health is spiraling into a state of emergency.

Our story begins with Clarence's diagnosis. Today, it would be bipolar disorder. Then, it was "fried nerves": a terribly shameful diagnosis for a man, let alone a respectable physician. Clarence's struggle is threatening his medical practice. And a particularly public episode sounds the alarm for Grace. She calls a psychiatrist who recommends Clarence take a REST CURE: a treatment primarily reserved for women. Knowing he needs it, but that no one can know about it, the Hemingway parents concoct an elaborate web of lies to explain why he will not be with the family that summer at their Northern Michigan lake house.

And with that, Season 01 is set into motion. The first 5 episodes follow a family covering up Clarence's struggle, setting a concrete foundation of shame and secrecy that will linger through the entire series. Episode 6 is the SHOT we have been dreading to hear: Clarence has taken his life in the upstairs master bedroom. In a moment, Grace has become a widow, left to deal with a disastrous financial situation that Clarence kept hidden until the end. The final four episodes follow Grace as she – a woman condemned by 1920's society for her ego, her independence, and her sense of professional self-worth – uses all those things to heal her shattered family (emotionally and financially).

The SECRETS. The SHOT. The AFTERMATH. That's the shape of this season. But, grief is not linear. A lot of messy hurt and healing happens in between.

Before the shot, Grace will be blamed for emasculating Clarence with her lavish, unusual lifestyle. In his absence, she will have to step up as a mother, as her kids rebel and disrespect her. She'll get tangled up in a lesbian love affair with her music student turned family nanny, kicking up old rumors about her affair with a NYC voice coach. And Grace, champion of bold expression, will learn the weight of secrets and shame.

After the shot, newly widowed Grace will face brutal accusations that she is to blame for the tragedy. When she shows too much emotion, the authorities will threaten mental asylum. When Grace does not show ENOUGH emotion, the town gossips grow louder – blaming her again and again. Her six children will take sides – between their grieving mother and dead father. No one will utter the "S" word. Grace's affairs will come under spotlight. The mortgage on the house will loom. While grief echos through that house, louder than any music ever has.

This is a heartbreaking tale of the way that world treats weak men and strong women. Is Grace's strength to blame for Clarence's struggle? What can we learn by going back and listening to her side of story?

THEME



The theme of this series is EXPRESSION vs. SUPPRESSION.

The dangers of suppressing our emotions are known. But when real grief hits, or when society casts judgement, it's often what we do: *suppress, repress, silence, disengage.*

Creative practices (music, writing, acting, painting) are powerful modes of expression on any day. But when real grief hits, and the threat of suppression lingers, these art forms become modes of survival.

TOPE



Have you been to a funeral? Then, you know how gut wrenching it is to watch someone eulogize a loved one, gone too soon.

Have you been to a funeral reception? Then, you know how confoundingly easy it is to slip between grief and joy:

---two polar opposite emotions, vibrating at such extreme frequencies that they almost touch. A guttural cry becomes a belly laugh, and then turns back to tears.

Have you listened to music while grieving? Gone to the movies when you didn't know what else to do with your shattered self?

Then you know that healing is a mammoth undertaking, and that art helps, but only by cracking you open first.

Grief is not a linear or logical ride, after all.

W. H. Auden wrote, "No Opera plot can be sensible, because people do not sing when they are feeling sensible." And that loud truth should guide the tone of this show: through both the high moments and the low notes.

TWO WORLDS

A photograph of two women in long, light-colored dresses hanging laundry on a line outdoors. The scene is set in a wooded area with large trees and dappled sunlight. The women are seen from behind, focused on their task. A wicker basket sits on the ground in the foreground.

OAK PARK, CHICAGO:

Oak Park is the Hemingway family's hometown: a Chicago suburb where lawns are wide and minds are narrow. Self-conscious suffragist wives come home to easy-going conservative husbands, while their teenagers bob their hair and hike up their hems.

In Season 01, the Roaring Twenties come thundering into this conservative town, entrenched in Victorian ideals, and forces each character to consider what values (re: gender, mental health, prosperity, happiness) they will reject, revise, or amend as they move into the next decade.

WALLOON LAKE, MICHIGAN:

If the tone of Oak Park is Victorian propriety, then that of Walloon is exultant freedom. The rules are different up here, and so is Grace. She shoots and hunts, while Clarence cooks and keeps the house. The kids run wild and Ernest cuts his teeth in the woods that will become synonymous with his public persona.

Every summer, the family makes the long trek from Oak Park up to Windemere Cottage on Walloon Lake. Every summer, innocence is lost, limits are tested, and childish delights are rediscovered. But the summer of 1920 stands out among them all. Season 01 unzips here.

SEASON 01:

CHARACTERS



GRACE HALL HEMINGWAY

Grace is an unfulfilled artist who struggles with (and shirks) the rigid societal expectations of a 1920's Victorian housewife.

She leaves the cooking, cleaning, and child rearing to others (namely her husband). Practicing alone for hours in her music room, Grace fiercely prioritizes her artistic life, desperate to hang onto what's left of it after walking away from a promising Opera career in Manhattan.

Back in the suburbs of Chicago, Grace is now the mother of six. But she makes more money on her expensive voice lessons than her doctor husband does on his disorganized medical practice – and Grace lives as she pleases off this independent income.

Have you ever met a brilliant talent who has been reduced to a small town teacher? Ouch, the pain. Yikes, the bruised ego.

But god forbid anyone see this struggle. To the world, Grace is exuberant, demanding, inspiring and infuriating. She is the picture of glamorous propriety, with a wanton bohemian edge.

Over season 01, Grace – the fierce advocate for loud expression – will have to grapple with secrets, shame, and silences. Her own shadows from the past (unrealized ambitions and buried sexual desires) will rise up, twisting with present responsibilities.

And when tragedy strikes, Grace will become the breadwinning matriarch of a large, loud family that she was never ready for.

Can creativity and caregiving live together? Grappling with that question, Grace will grow from tortured artist (using music as a solo escape) to empowered teacher (using music to heal a community).



DR. CLARENCE HEMINGWAY

The mental decline of DR. CLARENCE HEMINGWAY is the tragic time-lock of season 01. And his suicide in episode 05 is the first domino in a string of tragedies that will propel this show through three seasons of pain and healing.

Today, Clarence's diagnosis would be 'bipolar disorder.' In the 1920s, his struggle was merely labeled as "fried nerves" – a shameful condition for any respectable man.

And *RESPECT* is what Clarence is after! Respect for his medical practice, respect for his family, respect for his marriage, respect for his financial future, respect for what he has provided as a man.

But as Clarence's manic episodes and depressive bouts become more frequent, he starts to lose the respect and trust of those around him.

His patients start to worry about medical malpractice. Gossiping neighbors start to ridicule the power dynamic between Clarence and Grace. And their six children begin to wonder where their charming, cheerful, nature-loving, god-respecting father has gone.

As his mind slips, this scruffy nervous doctor clings to control: obsessive list-making, compulsive collecting of odd scientific specimens, and relentless micromanaging his children's lives.

Clarence's darkening mood is elephant at end of the dinner table.

And when he becomes one of the first male patients to undergo a "rest cure" (a bedrest treatment reserved for 'nervous women') his already taboo struggle becomes an ironclad secret that the entire family must protect.



THE TEENAGERS



MARCELLINE HEMINGWAY:

Marcelline Hemingway takes after her mother: she's got Grace's wit, headstrong independence, competitive streak, and striking beauty – but “Marce” hates to hear those comparisons, especially when they come from her younger brother Ernie. Becoming an unfulfilled Oak Park matron is her greatest fear.

Marce has big goals: attending University, pursuing an academic career, and forging her own path. But, ever the peacemaker of this family, trouble and tragedy keep pulling her back home.

ERNEST HEMINGWAY:

We meet “Ernie” a few summers before his big break. He’s still loafing around the lake, chasing after girls, and fighting with a nagging mother who insists he get a job. As he builds an emerging writing career on images of masculinity, he grows angry with his father’s weakness, and even angrier at his mother’s strength.

Ernest’s indulgences and ego are ultimately what will wake Grace up to her own. This mother and son are more similar than either care to admit. A painful paradox, as the world will celebrate this strength in Ernest, and condemn it in Grace.

URSULA HEMINGWAY:

When we meet 17 year old “Ura” in 1920, she is boy crazy & bound for disgrace (her father’s words). She is vivacious, full of life, and in love with both Marvin and Joe, amongst others. This grand capacity for love extends to her siblings and parents. She’s Ernie’s favorite and has her father wrapped around her finger.

But as the Roaring Twenties come barreling into Oak Park, and the men in her life start to criticize her *joie de vivre*, Ura must learn how to love herself – even when it costs her admiration & approval from others.



THE KIDS

“SUNNY” HEMINGWAY:

Madeleine ‘Sunny’ Hemingway is a stubborn tomboy with a heart of gold. A middle child manifest, she’s caught between the teenager’s mischievous plans and the younger kids’ innocent games. As such, Sunny’s coming-of-age is comically chaotic: botched bob haircuts, bumbling first kisses, and endless opinions from all five of her siblings.

Everyone trusts Sunny with their secrets, relies on her in emergencies, and expects her to keep smiling. What happens when she stops playing the middle?

CAROL HEMINGWAY:

Carol is the youngest of the Hemingway girls. Her nickname ‘Beefie,’ lovingly dubbed by Ernest, is short for ‘Bee-Fish’: a tiny little guppy that does not tolerate intrusion into its territory. Carol upholds family traditions and insists on regular bonding, lacking a good read on the room.

Her fierce loyalty & unmarked innocence highlight the discord in the adults around her. But she also calls them back to the core of what it means to be family.

LEICESTER “LES” HEMINGWAY:

“Les” is 4 years old when we meet him: adventurous, adorable and wide-eyed about the world. As the youngest, he is often left behind. His unsupervised wanderings emphasize Grace’s absence & Clarence’s growing mental distance.

While no one may be paying attention to Les, the weight of this family still falls squarely on this little boy’s shoulders. Finding his father’s body, testifying alone, being warned not to cry – we watch Les grow up into a hardened, stoic young man, with no option to be soft.

THE LOVER

A woman with long, dark, wavy hair is shown in profile, looking out of a window. The lighting is soft and warm, suggesting an indoor setting with natural light coming from the window. The background is slightly blurred, showing architectural details like a window frame and a decorative column.

RUTH ARNOLD:

Ruth is Grace's oldest music student. Embarrassingly old.

A 21-year-old towering over the other 10-year-old classmates at the annual Hemingway recital. Ruth knows she needs to move on. To start her adult life.

But she's been dealt a painstakingly ordinary hand. Ruth was raised by an austere single father and overbearing dressmaking sister, who expects Ruth to join her in the dress shop very soon. Ruth wants something else.

She wants what the Hemingways have; what she has glimpsed through those hour-long voice lessons with Grace: *noise, unconditional love, family traditions, chaos, and life beyond convention.*

When Ruth is offered a job as the Hemingways' nanny for the summer, in exchange for continued voice lessons with Grace, she takes it. And quickly discovers how many silenced secrets are hidden behind the full-volume dinner conversations.

Quiet until now, Ruth will be forced to sharpen her wit, keep up with the banter, and learn to choose sides wisely. Ruth is the newcomer who takes us into the heart of the Hemingway family's traditions, troubles, and traumas.

But when Ruth's uncharted romantic & sexual desires for Grace grow stronger than her duty to the Hemingway family, she will have to decide why she's really here: to find belonging... or to learn independence?

To keep the Hemingways together... or to catch Grace as she unravels?

THE VILLAINS

A woman in a brown hat and coat looks serious, with another woman in profile next to her. The background is dark and out of focus.

THE NEIGHBORS:

The biggest villain in this story is the small town of OAK PARK: a Chicago suburb where lawns are wide, minds are narrow, and gossip is rampant.

Mental health and gender can be abstract concepts, but this town (that tears down weak men and condemns strong women) becomes the visible, tangible monster: ripping this family apart and pounding on their door all season long.

These OAK PARK NEIGHBORS are more than just wagging tongues casting judgment on the Hemingways. They are the paying patrons of Clarence's medical practice and Grace's voice lessons. As they start to worry about Clarence's professionalism and wonder about Grace's sexual leanings, they pull back – a retreat that threatens the financial future (and reputation) of the Hemingways.

ELEANOR LOOMIS:

The unofficial head of the Oak Park "gossip club." No scandal goes unreported or un-amplified by Eleanor Loomis. She's a suffragist who wants to be on the side of Progress. But Grace's independence is just *too much* for her. Eleanor will dig up Grace's past, scrutinize Grace's relationship with Ruth, and hold up every misstep of Grace's for the whole town to see.



THE VILLAINS

DR. SILAS MITCHELL:

Dr. Silas Mitchell is the (real life) pioneer of the "REST CURE" (a barbaric treatment for nervous women, consisting of bedrest, high-calorie diets & zero intellectual activity) and the "WEST CURE" (an alternative treatment for men, consisting of fresh air, vigorous exercise & reflective writing).

Clarence is one of Dr. Mitchell's few male patients to take the "rest cure." Over season 01, Dr. Mitchell will blame Dr. Hemingway's "unusual" weaknesses and struggle on his over-stimulated, oversocialized, out-of-line wife: GRACE.

UNCLE GEORGE:

Clarence's wealthy brother struck gold in a series of risky real estate gambles. George represents that social ease and financial abundance that his brother Clarence can never settle into. But after advising Clarence on some failing Florida land investments, things will go sour, for both brothers.

When Clarence loses his life over money worries (clearly linked to the Florida land), George will guiltily cover up the transactions and play into the narrative that his brother was a weak, damaged man.



SEASON 01:

EPISODES



EOI: MAKING PLANS (PILOT)

We meet GRACE hosting her annual recital for her music students. This is her night to show it all off! Her six children are impressively charming and talented. Her house is large and eccentric. And her young students are beautifully trained.

But as the recital evening unfolds, Grace's husband DR. CLARENCE HEMINGWAY's declining mental health and a groundswell of familial tensions are laid bare – with the whole town in their living room. Returning from a late patient visit, Clarence's behavior alarms the partygoers gathered in Grace's kitchen. And the patient's worried mother is knocking at the door: urging Grace to help the doctor find a doctor of his own.

Realizing how serious this has become, Grace calls up the famed psychiatrist DR. SILAS MITCHELL, who urges Clarence to take a 'rest cure' this summer to ease his fried nerves (today, his diagnosis would be bipolar disorder). Dr. Mitchell's diagnosis does NOT spare Grace. He rips into her, blaming Clarence's struggle on Grace's "out of line" indulgences and freedoms. She is ordered to stop giving voice lessons and to start showing up for her family. Gaslit by the dated medical lens on both struggling men and strong women, Grace starts to wonder if she really is the problem.

A REST CURE is a treatment historically reserved for 'nervous women.' And this sort of thing would damage any man's reputation or doctor's practice in the 1920's. So, it becomes an ironclad family secret and the catalyst for a growing web of lies. Evading the relentless snooping of gossiping neighbors, Grace and Clarence decide that Clarence will go to Florida to rest – under the guise of a prestigious medical conference.

Grace, who was looking forward to a summer of freedom at their Michigan lake house, must now prepare for a summer of solo parenting. Deeply worried about finances, Clarence refuses to let her hire a nanny. The approaching summer is already a tense topic, as Grace went against Clarence's wishes and built herself a 1-bedroom cottage across the lake from the family house: a place to paint, sing, and escape the noise of her growing family. Ernest won't forgive her for spending "the college funds" on such a selfish whim. And without Clarence around this summer, chances for escape are looking slim. Grace's world is crashing in on her.

Unaware of their growing intimacy, Clarence invites Grace's music student RUTH ARNOLD to Michigan for the summer, to work as the family's nanny – in exchange for continued voice lessons with Grace. Despite her dangerous spark with Ruth, Grace accepts the help.

As they prepare to leave for the lake, Grace finds a stack of LIFE INSURANCE LETTERS addressed to Clarence. Will the rest cure be enough to help him? The shadows of Grace's past (unrealized artistic ambitions, buried sexual desires) are twisting together with her present realities (an unruly family, a growing web of shadowy secrets, & looming tragedy).



E02: SUMMER RULES

Grace, Ruth, and the children leave for WALLOON LAKE and we plunge into the summer that will change it all – for all of the Hemingways. Grace's new cottage, dubbed GRACE COTTAGE, is finally complete and she eagerly offloads the burden of her unruly teenage clan onto Ruth, rowing over to her solo haven each morning.

Back at Windemere, Ursula (17) and Sunny (14) get tangled up in summer romances and midnight social escapades. Carol (7) and Les (4) struggle with the lapse in innocent family traditions and getting left behind as their siblings come into their own. Ernest (19) goes AWOL from his promised household help, leaving an unequipped and overwhelmed Ruth to pick up the pieces. His anger towards his mother grows stronger, while his desire to define himself as an artist starts to mirror her (more than either care to admit).

Letters from Clarence arrive each morning, obsessively numbered and increasingly paranoid. But Grace blocks it all out, rowing herself over to GRACE COTTAGE day after day. As she starts to invite Ruth over to her haven for music lessons, their friendship turns into a steamy clandestine affair. The “rules of summer” have always been lax, but everyone is pushing them to their limits this year.

E03: THE EVICTIONS

On one fateful July night, everything at the lake comes to a fever pitch. The teenagers sneak out to a midnight bonfire, dragging the neighbors into the debauchery. And Grace and Ruth spend the night together, for the first time. When an OAK PARK PARENT finds her kids missing from their beds and assumes the Hemingway clan is behind it, she storms down the shore... and finds Grace and Ruth together – seeding a wildfire of small town gossip.

The next morning, in an effort to overcorrect and save face, Grace blames Ernest for ring-leading the party – and evicts him from the house. She repurposes his annual birthday letter as an eviction note, dictating to Ruth, speaking of the price we must all pay for our priorities. Ruth, watching Grace recommit to her role as mother and wife in a chaotic pendulum swing, realizes Grace's reprimanding lecture is directed as much to herself as it is to her son.

Bunked up one town over, Ernest makes a call to his father to report he illicit spark between Grace and Ruth. And a few days later, Clarence shows up in Michigan. He's cut his “rest cure” short to come restore order to his family. Grace is furious. Amidst a mental episode, he “evicts” Ruth and orders her to return home before the summer is over. Grace does not come to Ruth's defense. She sits silently beside her husband, repenting for her role in the spiral.



E04: SILENCE & SECRETS

Grace returns home from the summer – silenced and stunned. Ernest won't speak to her. Clarence won't put up with her antics any longer. Even playing music doesn't feel right anymore, as the memories it unearths are jarring – a glittering universe that no longer is hers.

The house is unusually quiet. But the town is abuzz with rumors about Grace and Ruth. Lonely and confused about where she belongs, Grace attempts to re-enter Oak Park society and is pelted with judgement about her romantic wanderings. Back at home, Grace tries to reconnect with Clarence. Hearing about the real estate boom in Florida from his brother GEORGE, the Hemingways start to imagine their retirement there together. As with all things, Grace leans in. Grace “quits” music and picks up oil painting: a quieter hobby, that she can take with her when they head South. The Florida plan momentarily lifts Clarence's spirits.

But Clarence is growing more distant each day. And Grace is growing lonelier. Worrying about her mother, Marcelline begins to stealthily deliver letters between Ruth and Grace. The restored friendship starts to bring Grace back to life. She leans into painting, and proves to be quite a talent. Colorful oil paintings stack up in Grace's retired music room. Down the hall, a mountain of debt begins to pile up Clarence's office. The Florida investments are souring. But he doesn't tell Grace, worried to extinguish her new spark. Worried to fail his family.

E05: THE CHRISTMAS DINNER

Winter doesn't help the ominous mood settling over the Hemingways. Grace learns that Ruth is engaged to MR. HARRY MEEHAN. Clarence is a worried mess over the growing financial mess. Ernest's new book, featuring poorly disguised characters from their Oak Park community, scandalizes the small town. But he's newly engaged to HADLEY RICHARDSON, and they are both coming home for the holidays. Grace is hellbent on making nice.

Christmas dinner is a buzzy bust. Clarence is a nervous wreck, and can't stop talking about his gift to his family: financial security through this Florida land. The kids are distraught over their father's condition and bickering with one another. Grace tries to keep things merry, but it's one of those holidays that leaves you feeling more hollow than hole.

After all the guests are gone, Grace and Clarence both make private phone calls. Clarence calls up his brother George and tells him he's going to mortgage the house, against George's stern recommendation not to. And Grace calls up Ruth: asking her to come visit the following week when Clarence is in Florida to check on the investments.

E06: THE SHOT

DECEMBER 6th, 1928. *Eight years later.* We glimpse the wear of those 8 years by joining Clarence on his drive home from work: exhausted, a shell of himself. In his passenger seat, we see a pile of paperwork and a circled-in-red payment deadline: DECEMBER 10th, 1928.

Arriving at home, Clarence tells Grace he is going to lie down before lunch. A SHOT rings out. Clarence has committed suicide in the upstairs master bedroom. Grace – grieving, hysterical – searches the house for a note or explanation. We're back in the TEASER.

Ruth attempts to calm Grace, warning her that the authorities will lock her away in a psych ward if she shows too much emotion. Hysteria: a sentence that only requires two signatures. Grace storms out, refusing to be told how to act right now.

Carol sends a telegram to her older siblings, living on their own now. And all 6 Hemingway children rush home from around the country. Les, who found the body, must testify to the coroner. He is instructed to say it was a gun cleaning accident, and not to dare cry. But the death is inevitably ruled a suicide. None of the twelve life insurance policies that Clarence took out will receive a payout. And as the ruling echos around town, a cloud of shame and stigma settles over the Hemingway family. Can they remember their father for his happier days? Is the "crazy" that killed him inside the rest of them?

The family fights over how to move forward. No one utters the "S" word.

All of Oak Park attends the funeral and the reception at the house. Neighbors whisper. Ruth shows up, amping up the gossip volume. Marceline is pregnant and devastated — would it have made a difference if she hadn't hidden his child as a Christmas surprise for Clarence? Carol, Ursula and Les all hold their own regrets. Ernest, his grief growing in real time, devolves at the reception. He publicly blames his mother and leaves Oak Park for the last time.



E07: THE PRICE OF OUR PRIORITIES

Grace learns the extent of the financial crisis Clarence left them in. He even mortgaged the paid-off house. Desperate to cover his responsibility in the failing FL investments, George gets (overly) involved and suggests Grace sell the house. Grace refuses. She will start giving voice lessons again. If she misses a mortgage payment, they can revisit the issue.

But before Grace can fathom restarting music lessons, grief hits hard. She struggles to understand how the world keeps spinning. *Why is the mailman here just days after his death?! Don't they know?* And suddenly, every worry in her head has a price attached to it. Her younger kids hoped to attend college. The house is falling apart. The lakehouse needs a new roof. Had Clarence worried about all these things? Why had she not?

Before Marcelline heads back to Minneapolis, she pleads with Ruth to come back and take care of Grace. Newly widowed, Ruth agrees. Reunited, Ruth and Grace – old friends and new widows – examine the price they have paid for their priorities over the decades. Their loyal companionship draws icy stares from the neighbors. But they are helping each other survive. And for once, they don't care what others have to say about it.

Ruth slowly gets Grace to play the piano again, reawakening her spark. Can all the things that Ernest, George, and society condemn Grace for — her independence, strength, and creative ego — become exactly what will heal her shattered family (emotionally and financially)?

E08: GROUNDS FOR HYSTERIA

Grace commits to restarting her voice lessons. But there are a few roadblocks. The first: students. None of the Oak Park mothers want to send their children to the Hemingways: where the shadow of suicide lingers, where Grace is living “androgynously” with Ruth.

Grace socializes, networks, slyly campaigns – and starts to understand just what a stigma her husband's death (and her inferred hand in it) have left on their family. And she starts to doubt her voice -- something she thought she'd always have, but is losing in old age. Playing music again in the house, old memories flood back and crack open her grief.

As Grace tries to re-enter Oak Park society, grief washes over her. Her public show of emotions, amplified by a return to music, draw whispers from the neighbors. Ruth warns her that they are whispering about how easy it would be to lock Grace away for hysteria. Naturally, this enrages Grace and gets her into more trouble.

The line between passion and insanity is blurred. And the way that the world treats struggling men and strong women is put under the microscope. Through the unfair treatment, Grace finds deep empathy for her late husband and fierce loyalty towards Ruth.



E09: THE HOUSE THAT GRACE BUILT

Grace secures a few music students. And, with the help of her three youngest kids still living at home – SUNNY, CAROL and LES - the house fills back up with noise and joy. There is a noticeable shift in Grace: from tortured artist seeking escape through music, to empowered teacher using music to heal and help those around her.

With this new momentum, Grace comes close... but doesn't make the next mortgage payment. George swoops in with "I told you so" reprimands. But Grace makes peace with selling the house. Her kids are almost all grown and gone. And she, despite the daggers pointed at them, will move in with Ruth one town over.

But Grace, newly enlivened to her role as mother, is less prepared for an empty nest than she thinks. Without her house full of kids, who is she? After she moves in with Grace, an unusual depression settles over her. She's not painting or singing or socializing. Ruth asks her pointedly: *what are you going to do with the second act of your life?*

Grace buys a used Pontiac and tells Ruth she wants to hit the road: to visit her children now scattered around the country and to paint landscapes along the way. This plan ignites an argument, as Grace plans to leave Carol and Les with Ruth. Grace's loyal servant, who has never complained, finally unloads.

But when they walk into the living room and see Carol teaching Ruth's daughter to play the piano, they realize that they've become an odd family of their own.

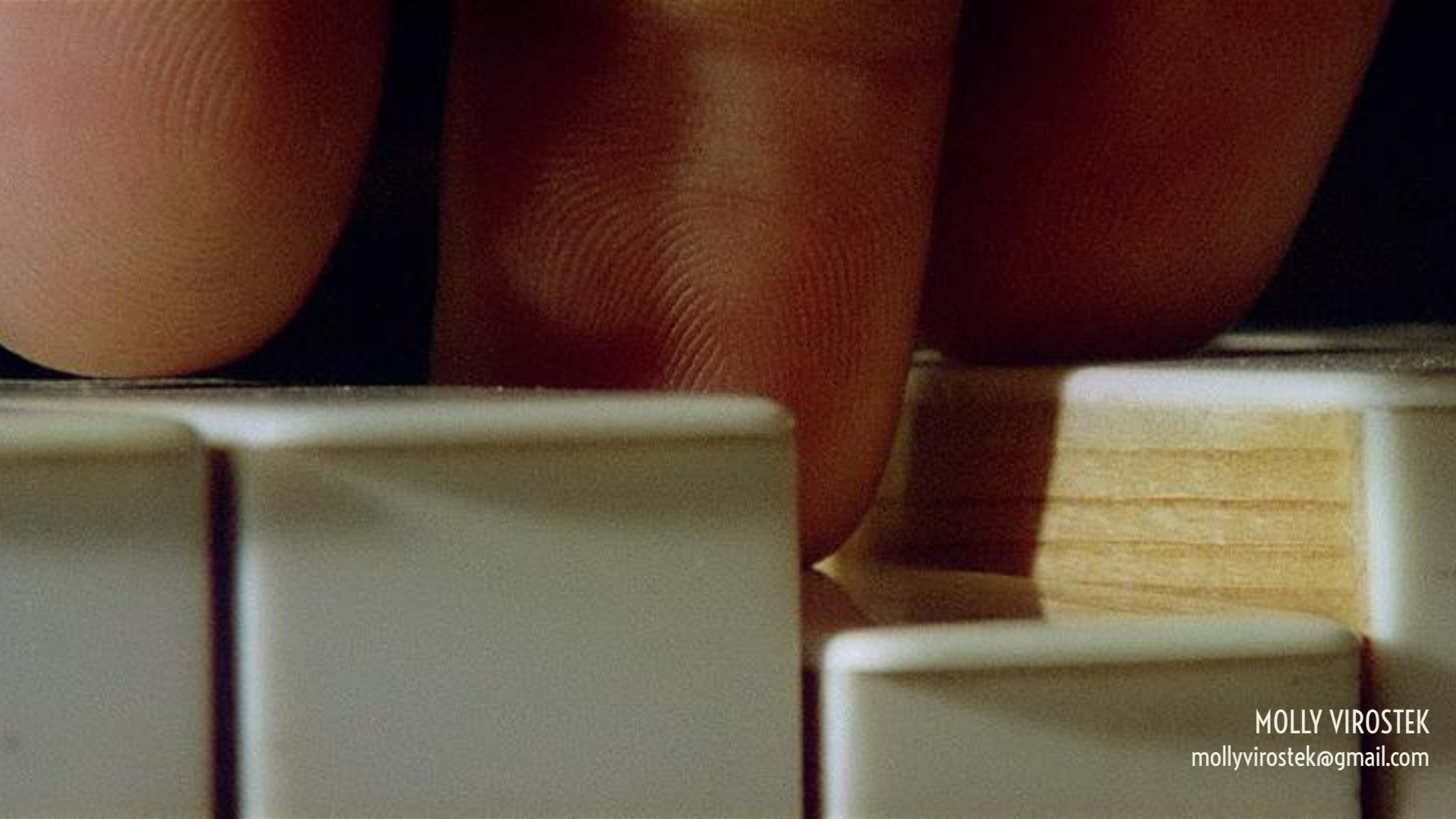
E10: THE ROAD FORWARD

Grace hits the road - visiting Marce in Minneapolis and Ursula in Idaho. At both stops, she faces the gaps in her parenting and the grievances her kids still hold. It's more humbling than heartwarming. Along the road, Grace sets up her easel in her car and paints.

Her final stop is to visit Ernest, his second wife PAULINE, and their two kids: PATRICK and GREGORY. But when she pulls up, Ernest refuses to let his sons drive with her. She hears him calling her androgynous. She is shocked how hardened the blame has become.

Back in River Forest with Ruth, Grace faces her final task: her lawyers have been hounding her about the deed to Windemere and her final will. After a long contemplation, Grace signs over Windemere to Ernest. She keeps Grace Cottage for herself.

Ernest writes and writes. He fights with Pauline, then apologizes. Seeing his mother brings up a lot. Ernest walks into Pauline's room and finds Gregory trying on Pauline's clothes. He goes berserk, and then breaks down, saying: *Gigi, we come from a strange tribe, you and I.*



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