

THE SECRET OF LIFE

An Original Screenplay

written by

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FADE IN:

COLORADO - 1910

EXT. WATERFALL - DAY

A new automobile bumps along a rugged mountain path. The car stops by a creek riddled with boulders and a steep incline of white water.

CLAYTON MIREAUX, a well-dressed old man, and ARTHUR, 10, get out.

Excited, Arthur runs to the creek.

ARTHUR

Is this it, Grandpa?

CLAY

This is it, boy. What do you think?

Clay catches up and touches the boy's shoulder.

CLAY

Stay back from there, Arthur.  
You know I can't swim.

Arthur's foot slides on a loose rock.

Clay grabs for the boy's suspenders, but his hand slips.

Arthur plunges into deep water and sweeps toward the falls.

ARTHUR

Grandpa! Help!

Fearful, Clay leaps in. He flails and gulps water.

But now Arthur floats on his back, past boulders with feet pointed downstream, giggling.

ARTHUR

Wahoo!

At the bottom of the falls, Clay frantically treads water, spinning and looking.

CLAY

Arthur! Where - ? Arthur!

From shore, Arthur gives Clay a wave and a big smile.

Clay drags himself out and sinks into the mud.

Arthur leans over him.

ARTHUR

Grandpa? You OK?

Clay catches his breath and strokes Arthur's cheek.

ARTHUR

Tell me the story again -  
why they call this waterfall  
the Secret of Life.

CLAY

Oh, Arthur. It's too long.

ARTHUR

Please, Grandpa. Tell me the  
story.

CLAY

Look at us. Get the blankets.

Arthur runs to the car, while Clay rises and glares at the churning water.

Arthur bounces back with a picnic basket and blankets.

Clay tousles the boy's wet hair and wraps a blanket around Arthur's shoulders.

CLAY

You're a mess.

Clay spreads another blanket. Arthur jumps on with muddy feet. Clay just shrugs as Arthur digs for a sandwich.

ARTHUR

OK, start the story.

CLAY

Do you know what persuasive means? You're very persuasive.

Arthur traps Clay with a charming smile. As Arthur stuffs meat and bread into his mouth, Clay winks at him.

CLAY

Well, when I first came to Colorado - .

ARTHUR

Grandpa, start in St. Louis. I like that part.

Sighing, Clay reaches for a sandwich.

CLAY

You don't mind if I eat, too.

FLASHBACK - ST. LOUIS (1875)

INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - DAY

ST. LOUIS EXPRESS is painted on the front window.

AUGUSTE, a sturdy, stern man in his 60s, sits at a cluttered desk, reading copy. A name plate says AUGUSTE MIREAUX, EDITOR AND PUBLISHER.

CLAY (VO)

It was a long time ago, Arthur. I ran the newspaper for my father. I was always a strong writer.

As Auguste reads, he corrects copy, shakes his head with displeasure, and calls to the back room.

AUGUSTE

Clayton, come here, please. I want to show you something about this story.

No response. Auguste adjusts his eyeglasses. He goes to the doorway to the back room.

AUGUSTE  
Tommy! Where's Clay?

TOMMY, 16, a gangly office boy, peeks around the corner.

TOMMY  
Not back yet, Mister Mirieux.

Disgusted, Auguste checks his watch.

AUGUSTE  
Find him again, and tell him to  
come here right now. Right now.

TOMMY  
Yes, sir.

AUGUSTE  
And tell Mrs. Mireaux I'll be  
late for dinner. Then go home  
to your mother.

Softening, Auguste tosses Tommy a coin.

TOMMY  
Thank you, sir.

As Tommy lumbers out, Auguste checks his watch again and  
kicks the side of his desk.

INT. DUFFY'S SALOON - DAY

A PIANO PLAYER plays. Lively, smoky, sunset.

CLAY, a handsome, well-dressed charmer in his 30s, drinks  
beer, surrounded by SALOON GIRLS.

CARRIE, 16 and well-endowed, wiggles onto his lap.

One of the older girls, LUCILLE, wipes Clay's mouth. He  
winks at her and smiles, revealing a special connection.

Clay reaches around Carrie for the pitcher but spills it.  
He lifts Carrie and swats her mischievously.

CLAY

Get more, will you, doll?

Carrie rubs her hip as she flirts all the way to the bar.

Clay's eyes follow her - too long for Lucille.

From a nearby table, GAMBLER #1 motions for Clay to join  
ST. LOUIS GAMBLERS.

They deal him in and play a hand, taking cards, betting.

GAMBLER #1

Call.

Clay shows his cards - FOUR OF A KIND. He laughs as the  
losers groan.

Tommy enters timidly in the background, watching Clay  
enviously as Lucille whispers into Clay's ear.

Clay gathers the cards from the table and rubs her waist.

CLAY

Later, darlin'. After a few  
more hands.

She kisses the back of his neck while he shuffles.

CLAY

Don't be brazen. I'll be up  
soon.

Lucille stomps off. The Gamblers hoot and laugh.

Tommy approaches and speaks quietly while Clay deals.

TOMMY

Clay, crap, you didn't leave  
yet?

CLAY

Can't, Tom. I'm winning.

TOMMY

Your father was most insistent.



