

THE SPIRIT OF ROBERT DUVAL

Written by

Lawrence Whitener

Based on my true dream the night after I learned of his death.

WGA-East #I-384623
303 Fieldstone Ln
Blacksburg, VA 24060
(c) 540-449-6575
(e) L_WH@aol.com
U.S. Copyright in 2026
by Lawrence Whitener

FADE IN:

CAPTION: *All Robert Duvall dialogue are his own true quotes.*

FADE CAPTION: *Based on the real event.*

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Queen size bed, night table, tall thin lamp, tall cardboard bureau, and one wooden chair across from the foot of the bed.

Asleep under bed's covers is LAWRENCE WHITENER, an award-winning character actor still unknown to most. He is tossing and turning then sits straight up wearing paisley pajamas.

WHITENER

No!

(scans room scared, calms)

Just a dream, wasn't real.

DUVALL

"You never know how reality is going to coincide with your dreams."

Whitener rockets upright against his bed's back wall *clicking* on the nightstand's 1970 western lamp.

Standing at the foot of his bed is actor ROBERT SELDEN DUVALL wearing his "Lonesome Dove" costume.

WHITENER

Robert Duvall? But you're --?

Duvall tosses his beaver fur "Gus" cowboy hat onto the bed.

DUVALL

"Call me Bobby."

WHITENER

But you only allow friends to call you that?

DUVALL

"A friend is someone who many years ago offered you his last \$300 when you broke your pelvis. Gene Hackman is a friend."

WHITENER

What are you doing here?

Duvall sits in the wooden chair and gets comfortable.

DUVALL

"If I can help people, not that I set out to do that, but if I can maintain myself spiritually, being a law unto myself and a legitimate island unto myself, so that I help others then so be it. That's kind of the way I look at things."

WHITENER

Why are you wearing your "Lonesome Dove" costume?

DUVALL

"Lonesome Dove is like the Bible. People will watch it in droves once, twice a year."

(his wonderful smile)

"A woman came up to me at a meeting and said, My daughter married recently and her fiancé had never seen Lonesome Dove and we would not allow him to marry into the family until he had."

(his signature *laugh*)

"The English have Shakespeare; the French, Moliere; the Russians have Chekhov, but The Western is ours."

Whitener points at the only picture on his bedroom wall, an autographed picture from Duvall wearing this same outfit.

WHITENER

Thank you for sending your autographed picture after working with you in "Gods and Generals." I did my college paper on Robert E. Lee so when "He" actually walked onto Set --wow.

DUVALL

"My father's people are from Fairfax in Northern Virginia, just across the Mason-Dixon line. So it was an honor to play Lee. Without thinking about it too much, it was a lot like my father, the accent, everything. I just talked like my Dad. It's in the blood. You're not gonna get that out of 150 books."

WHITENER

Is that why I'm dreaming you're here, because we worked together?

DUVALL

"If you don't dream and kind of plan things out in your imagination, you never get there."

WHITENER

My nightmare is that even after being in a 100 films as a character actor, I'll never become a star.

DUVALL

"Being a star is an agent's dream, not an actor's. I always considered myself as a character actor."

WHITENER

But I've gotten so close so many times to "making it," it's not ...

DUVALL

"Let the process take you to the result rather than going to the result. I talk, you listen. You talk, I listen. And it goes from there. Observe, observe, observe."

WHITENER

Well at least I managed to be a good father.

DUVALL

"Not every successful man is a good father, but every good father is a successful man".

WHITENER

"The best thing you can give your child is a good example." Benjamin Franklin. That's what I gave the homeless kid I took in from my high school team, and he flourished.

DUVALL

"If you don't have heroes in the beginning, you don't grow."

WHITENER

Who was your acting hero?

DUVALL

"Brando didn't act. He just was. That's the whole lesson right there if you're paying attention. He was our guy, a hero to us."

WHITENER

What was it like working with Marlon Brando in "The Godfather?"

DUVALL

"He didn't like to talk about The Business. I didn't get that close to him. I sent him a copy of *The Apostle*."

WHITENER

Your own movie about a Pentecostal preacher you wrote and directed? You visited black churches for thirteen years to "observe" for it.

DUVALL

"I love going to black churches, and I love some of these black preachers. The best preacher I ever saw in my life was a 93-year-old in a black church in Hamilton, Virginia. What a preacher!"

WHITENER

"The Apostle" was the fifth time you were nominated for an Oscar.

DUVALL

"Brando really liked it. He wrote me a letter and everything. I like that letter on my wall almost as much as my Oscar. More maybe."

WHITENER

Your Oscar Win was finally for "Tender Mercies" as a washed-up alcoholic country-western star where you did your own singing.

DUVALL

"What's the point if you're not going to do your own?"

WHITENER

And that film set the foundation for your own religious beliefs.

DUVALL

"We're all kin through Jesus. Not just what we read about Him in the Bible but who He is. That was the secret to powerful faith, the power I wanted to convey in my movie."

WHITENER

Along with powerful acting.

DUVALL

"You just keep at it everyday and hope you're getting somewhere."

WHITENER

You've always been my hero for becoming a 'real' actor.

DUVALL

"The best acting is reacting."

WHITENER

Steve McQueen proved that.

DUVALL

"You can be a good actor coming from a sense of truth or a sense of lying. You can get good performances from both approaches. There's no finish line for actors."

WHITENER

Sure felt like it when my wife of 35 years asked for a divorce because I wanted to follow my dream of going into Show Business so late in life. She said I was never going to make any money at it.

DUVALL

"Don't judge worth by money, son."

WHITENER

I gave her everything. I actually left her a millionaire and moved to Los Angeles with nothing. Noth-ing.

DUVALL

"There comes a time when you have to call it quits."

WHITENER

You should know after being divorced three times.

DUVALL

"Well, I can't live without a woman. I have to have a woman, have to have a wife."

WHITENER

I know the feeling! *And that's all I know now.* Your love of Argentina is where you met your fourth wife.

DUVALL

"Going to Argentina, I liked it more there than anyplace else. I met my wife on the street."

WHITENER

Literally.

DUVALL

"The flower shop was closed so I went to the bakery. If the flower shop had been open, I never would've met her."

WHITENER

Then she trained in tango for a year to be in your fourth self-made movie "Assassination Tango."

DUVALL

"You just can't take a crash course to be a tango dancer in a movie. If you tango fast, you have to think slow. The beginning and the end of the tango is The Walk."

WHITENER

And you've both danced married for twenty years.

DUVALL

"She was my lady. Best part of life."

WHITENER

Who helped you found "The Robert Duvall Children's Fund" to assist poor families and children in Northern Argentina that has now expanded into the entire world.

DUVALL

"Maybe that's how I was meant to do it, not by raising one child, but by helping many."

WHITENER

That's why I coached. But sometimes I lose my belief in myself.

Whitener turns melancholic remembering his failures.

WHITENER

There's a 1,000 reasons you don't get a part and none of them have to do with talent, and there's always so much time between acting gigs.

DUVALL

"A young actor once asked me, What do you do between jobs? I said, hobbies, hobbies, and more hobbies. Keeps you off dope."

WHITENER

Like your tango dancing. Which is why I work on my screenplays all day everyday. I'm always alone, but only lonely sometimes.

DUVALL

"It's no big thing, but you make big things out of little things sometimes."

WHITENER

Like in your film "Tomorrow."

Whitener picks up it's DVD from a holder on his nightstand.

WHITENER

Thank you for signing this when we met to discuss my screenplay. And you autographed it, "Bob!"

Duvall points to the same DVD.

DUVALL

"I still point to Fentry as my best part."

WHITENER

Which is why I named my script's character "Fenton." I wrote that part for you, you know. *But I already told you that when we met.*

Whitener puts down DVD.

Duvall does his signature teeth suck.

DUVALL

"If I were ten years younger I'd do it."

WHITENER

I worked with the same mule as you did in "Get Low. I became friends with her trainer like you did.

DUVALL

"That United States Champion mule came twenty miles from my home in Virginia, from Front Royal."

WHITENER

Where you visited her often the owner said. I learned your "Get Low" monologue "Don't know if I've been a good man." It got me cast for a part I wanted. Thank you.

DUVALL

"It's a wonderful profession. As long as people can benefit from what you do. --I saw you in The Great Santini and you helped me with my father, our relationship. It makes you feel good. You don't do it for that reason but it's fun. I'll keep on acting 'till they wipe the drool."

WHITENER

So my subconscious reached out to you for what, advice about life?

DUVALL

"All you can really do is try to be a good person and try to make good decisions and try to survive. A good person can make another person good. It means that goodness will elicit goodness in society, other persons will also become good."

WHITENER

Sometimes it doesn't seem that way.

DUVALL

"Sometimes, the things that may or may not be true are the things that a man needs to believe in the most. That people are basically good. That honor, courage, and virtue mean everything. That power and money, money and power, mean nothing. That good always triumphs over evil."

Duvall goes silent.

Whitener can tell Duvall's getting emotional.

DUVALL (CONT'D)

"I want you to remember this. Love, true love, never dies. Remember that, boy. *Remember that*. Doesn't matter if any of this is true or not. You see, a man should believe in these things because these are the things worth believing in. Got that?"

WHITENER

From your *Secondhand Lions* movie,
"Good speech."

DUVALL

"Think so? Thanks."

WHITENER

Guess that's how I'm feeling right now, a little "secondhand."

DUVALL

"If you piss your pants, you can only stay warm for so long."

WHITENER

Excuse me? Are you saying I'm feeling sorry for myself?

DUVALL

"The one you fight with the most is the one who's most like you."

WHITENER

No grey area, huh?

DUVALL

"There's no right or wrong, just truthful or untruthful."

WHITENER

So am I'm lying to myself?

DUVALL

"When I knew nothing, I thought I could do anything."

WHITENER

And here I "thought" I was just getting senile.

DUVALL

"The idea is that one's temperament improves with age, that you learn to deal better with people and become more benevolent and loving. That's not necessarily true. We're all travelers in this world, from the sweet grass to the packing house. Birth 'til death. We travel between the eternities."

WHITENER

Your "Broken Trail" monologue. My greatest life experience was riding horseback for 500 miles as a teen. Guess my best productive years are far behind me now. Death, is the inevitable end, of my life's story.

DUVALL

"It ain't dyin' I'm talkin' about, it's livin'!"

WHITENER

We're back to "Lonesome Dove?"

DUVALL

"If you want one thing too much it's likely to be a disappointment. The healthy way is to learn to like the everyday things."

WHITENER

You directing how I should live my life?

DUVALL

"Hey man, back off. You hired me to do it. Let me do it."

WHITENER

Your quote about Directors. Okay, so my ID brought your spirit here to help me sort through things. Got it. So what's really bothering me? My own mortality? Being a failure?

DUVALL

"I always figured from the cradle to the grave we all have our individual journeys and maybe my journey was a positive one and I accomplished certain things without stepping on too many toes."

WHITENER

I can't say your "toes" part.

DUVALL

"We all have a journey to make and in between, what do you do? There's got to be something hereafter. If people want to talk about God or whatever, that's their prerogative. I believe in a higher power and that's my own belief."

WHITENER

"Faith is believing in things when common sense tells you not to?"

Whitener begins to tear up.

WHITENER

I miss being married.

DUVALL

"The older the violin the sweeter the music."

WHITENER

Thanks, *Gus*. And thanks for showing up. I guess you did have an affect on my life. You were a class act.

DUVALL

"My acting teacher told us, when you create a character, it's like making a chair. Except instead of making something out of wood, you make it out of yourself. That's the actor's craft, create a character."

Duvall puts on his hat then stands with hands on hips and surveys the room like his Augustus McCrae character.

DUVALL

"Figured out why you and me get along so well. You know more than you say and I say more than I know."

WHITENER

Thanks again. *I think?*

DUVALL

"I hope I left behind a legacy that people will enjoy. But whatever they want to say, I can't predict."

Whitener smiles quoting the entire scene from "The Apostle."

WHITENER

"I guess you think you accomplished something?"

DUVALL

"I know I did."

WHITENER

"How do you know that?"

DUVALL

"Well, I'm gonna tell you. I'd rather die today and go to Heaven, than live to be a hundred and go to Hell."

WHITENER

"Is that a fact?"

DUVALL

"Yessir. Yessir, it is."

Duvall tips his hat then exits out the bedroom door.

DUVALL

"Woof. Glory. Wuuu Lord, thank ya'.
I had a wonderful career."

Whitener snuggles into pillow smiling reaching for the lamp.

WHITENER

Apostle, "one who is sent."

Whitener turns off the lamps then adds in the darkness.

WHITENER

He certainly was.

CURTAIN CALL.

DEDICATION: *To Steve Foster trainer of "Grace The Amazing Mule" and Robert Duvall. You both --made me a better man.*