

FIRST FLIGHT OUT

written by

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Revision 6

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FADE IN:

INT. AIRPORT GATE - EARLY MORNING

Bethany Halburn, 33 dressed in gray slacks, a nice blouse, and black flats sits alone at the gate next to her suitcase. It's as if she has a meeting to go to immediately after landing, where ever she's going. It is still dark out, and the airport is a ghost town. There isn't even a gate attendant at the gate yet. Bethany has her laptop on her lap, and is busy at work.

Moments later, George Halburn, Bethany's father spots his daughter at the gate and approaches. George is 64, with salt and pepper hair, and is dressed in jeans, a polo shirt, and a lightweight jacket. He looks every bit the image of a retiree.

GEORGE

Hey kiddo.

BETHANY

Dad, what are you doing here?
It's--

GEORGE

I know what time it is. I
couldn't sleep, and I wanted to
talk.

(a beat)

I know you're on a tight
schedule. So I figured I catch
you before your plane showed up.

George looks out the big picture window, onto an empty tarmac.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

(gesturing to a seat)

May I?

BETHANY

(conflicted)

Uh, sure.

GEORGE

I'm not interrupting anything, am
I?

BETHANY

No, just trying to get these briefs done so I can file them before I take off.

George sits next to Bethany.

GEORGE

It's the day after Thanksgiving. The courts are closed.

BETHANY

I know, but the earlier I get them in, the earlier I can move on to the next thing on my list. After that's done, hopefully I'll be able to relax for a little while this weekend.

GEORGE

Oh.

Bethany continues typing. The keystrokes are the only sound that can be heard in the empty terminal. She comes to a stopping point.

BETHANY

What did you want to talk about?

GEORGE

I'd like you to be the executrix for my estate.

BETHANY

(confused)

Of course, dad. I certainly didn't think you'd have David do it.

(a beat)

You didn't come all the way to the airport just to ask me that, did you?

GEORGE

No I didn't.

(a beat)

This is hard for me, and I wish I had an extra day to talk to you about it, but you always seem to leave so quickly after holidays.

Bethany looks at her father: "we've had this discussion before, dad."

She closes her laptop and sets it on the seat next to her.

BETHANY

Dad, I always take the first flight out after a holiday because it's cheaper, and it gives me the opportunity to get some extra work done. We've talked about this.

GEORGE

Would it be too much to ask for you to stay until Sunday next year? You can get your work done at the house. I upgraded the WiFi after your mother passed.

BETHANY

Why dad?

GEORGE

(agitated)

What do you mean, "why?" To spend some extra time with your old man and your brother.

BETHANY

You mean the brother who thinks I'm a communist?

GEORGE

Look, I didn't come here to talk to you about that, and besides he made that remark more than ten years ago, and he didn't mean it--

BETHANY

Except he did, dad.

GEORGE

So don't talk politics with him! We steered clear of that topic at dinner last night and I thought it was enjoyable for everyone.

BETHANY

Dad, we spent most of last night's dinner in silence.

A beat. George sighs heavily.

GEORGE

I guess I'm just wondering when I became so insufferable that you felt that we can't have a conversation at dinner, or that you feel like you have to run off immediately after every holiday.

(a beat)

I know you miss your mother, and I do too, but I love you, and I don't feel like we talk very much anymore.

BETHANY

Maybe the reason why you don't feel like we talk is because that's the first time you've told me you love me in years.

GEORGE

So you don't think I show it enough?

BETHANY

That's not it--

GEORGE

Well what is?!

BETHANY

No one in this family shows it, dad. And that's the way we've been conditioned.

(a beat)

Christ, when I was seven and I wanted an American Girl doll, you know what my grandparents got me? Shares in a fucking mutual fund.

GEORGE

I know, and that was a mistake, but in their own way, they were trying to tell you they loved you.

BETHANY

Don't you see how dysfunctional that is?

GEORGE

I raised you to be more grateful when receiving gifts. And you know those shares would have done well if it weren't for the financial crisis.

BETHANY

You really don't get it do you? Want a better example? Because mom wasn't any better. The last time I told her that I loved her, she said "mmm hmm."

(a beat)

Who the hell does she think she is, Han Solo?! She was on her death bed for crying out loud.

GEORGE

I get it. This family doesn't do well with emotions. What do you want me to do about it though?

BETHANY

I want you to rise above your upbringing and experiences.

GEORGE

What does that mean?

A beat. There are tears welding up in Bethany's eyes, but she fights to hold them back.

BETHANY

When I got the mutual funds for my birthday, I wanted to believe that your parents would do better next year. But in my heart of hearts, I knew that your mom and dad just didn't get it.

(a beat)

And it wasn't until a few years later that I found out that not only was the trait hereditary, but apparently you married someone who supported your emotional detachment.

(a beat)

I was in eleventh grade, and I'd started dating Mike Wagner. You, me, mom, and David were in the car together, and I was on the phone with Mike. We'd finished up the conversation, and I ended it by saying "I love you," to him.

(A beat)

I expected some ridicule from David about this, but I was completely taken aback by what you said after I'd hung up the phone.

(a beat)

You and mom told me that "I love you" shouldn't mean goodbye, and I spent the rest of the car ride wondering, if it isn't appropriate to say "I love you" at the end of a phone call, when is it appropriate to say it?

GEORGE

We were just trying to prevent you from getting your heart broken. Didn't you break up with him three months later?

BETHANY

Oh for God's sake, Dad. That's not the point at all!

(a beat)

Over the years, this family has taught me one thing, and that's that there's really no appropriate time to tell your family, your boyfriend, anyone that you love them. Not after phone calls, not at holidays, not even as they lay dying in front of you. My point is that my family, both immediate and extended, doesn't know how to act like a family at all!

GEORGE

You know, Bethany, you really don't give me enough credit.

BETHANY

For what?

GEORGE

For putting a roof over your head, food on the table, and a stable place to come home to at the end of the day. Do you know how many kids don't have those things growing up?

(a beat)

And let's not forget to mention the undergrad and law degrees that your mother and I helped finance. Maybe I wasn't good at saying "I love you," but I showed you and your brother that I loved both of you, 100 times over.

An uncomfortable silence.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

You ask me to rise above my upbringing. Well, apparently you need to rise above yours as well. Did you ever stop to think why your 64 year old father is doing estate planning?

BETHANY

You've always planned ahead.

GEORGE

Yeah, well, this time I'm not planning too far ahead. Like I said earlier, I didn't come here to talk about any of this.

BETHANY

What are you saying, dad?

GEORGE

I need to get everything in order because I was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer on Tuesday.

This hits Bethany like a ton of bricks.

BETHANY

What?

GEORGE

I start chemo tomorrow, but its the most aggressive form of cancer--

BETHANY

I know that. Why didn't you tell David and me last night?

GEORGE

I didn't want to ruin Thanksgiving.

(a beat)

I'm scared, Bethany. I'm really scared

Silence. Bethany puts her elbows on her knees and rests her head in her hands.

BETHANY

What's the prognosis?

GEORGE

My oncologist said that it's at best at an advanced stage three. They said a year, maybe a year and a half. A lot depends on how fast it spreads.

BETHANY

Please tell me you're going to go through chemo.

GEORGE

Of course. I can't just sit here and let it kill me. Not without putting up a fight.

BETHANY

How often will you need treatment?

GEORGE

It depends on how I respond to it. The doctor said that they'll start with three times a week, and go from there.

(a beat)

I have to admit, you're taking it a lot better than I thought you would.

BETHANY

Well, how am I supposed to feel about this, dad? Because there's a large part of me that wants to scream at you because I feel incredibly manipulated right now. What the hell am I supposed to do when I get news like this? You ask me to rise above my upbringing and appreciate what you did for me growing up, and I do! But you have to admit that we don't have a traditional father-daughter relationship. And yes, we're both to blame for that, but if I'm going to be the one to change, how can I hop on a plane home and let you battle cancer alone?

(a beat)

The other large part of me wants to break down and cry right now, but I feel like any expression of emotion is frowned upon in this family. It's seen as a weakness.

GEORGE

It's okay to cry. I know I did when I first heard the news.

Bethany's eyes fill with tears.

BETHANY

(with snark)

Well, thank you for giving me permission to feel something--

GEORGE

Can we be done with the hurtful remarks? For what it's worth, and I'm sure its not much at this point in your life, I'm sorry for the way I've made you feel.

(a beat)

The problem is that you're right. My attitude towards emotion, towards expressions of love, is hereditary. I learned from a young age that emotion clouds rational thought, and that irrational thinking can destroy you.

BETHANY

I know that we have to be rational, and clear headed, but there is always a time for emotion. If you don't show emotion, and you keep everything bottled up, that will also destroy you.

(a beat)

I love you more than words can say, Dad, and I'm scared too. I'm scared for you.

(a beat)

Let me change my flight to Sunday. I can drive you to your first chemo appointment, help you get situated. We can talk about a longer term plan after that.

George reaches into his pocket and produces a plane ticket.

GEORGE

I made an \$822 assumption that you'd say that.

BETHANY

You did not have to do that dad. I'm still earning my living, you're on Social Security.

GEORGE

Yeah, well. I love you, kiddo.

They hug, and George kisses his daughter on the cheek.

BETHANY

I love you too, Dad.

Bethany starts packing her briefcase with her laptop and other items. Bethany and George exit the terminal, just as a Gate Attendant arrives at the gate.

FADE OUT.

THE END