

DYING WITH DIGNITY

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. ROBINSONS' HOME - MORNING

CLAIRE ROBINSON, 63, lies in bed in her dimly-lit bedroom. A PILL BOTTLE sits on the nightstand along with a WIG.

A CALENDAR hangs on the wall with the current date, November 30, circled in red ink.

The ALARM CLOCK goes off. It's 10:00 AM.

Claire gets out of bed. She gets dressed and puts on her wig. She looks at the calendar on the wall. She turns around and looks at the pill bottle.

She walks out onto her balcony overlooking the Green Mountains of Vermont. She stands there and takes in the sun for a while.

She takes a deep breath and goes back inside.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Claire walks into the kitchen. Her husband FRANK, 64, is sitting at the table reading the newspaper. *

Frank is a large, balding man. He's an easy-going and supportive husband. *

Claire sits down at the table next to him. He doesn't notice her at first. He puts his paper down. *

FRANK

Oh. Good morning. I'll make you some coffee.

Frank gets up to make the coffee. Claire doesn't say a word. She stares blankly. Frank looks at her suspiciously.

FRANK (CONT'D)

What's the matter, Claire.

Claire doesn't respond. She sighs.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Claire...?

Claire snaps out of her trance.

CLAIRE
Nothing. What makes you think
there's something wrong?

FRANK
I don't know. It just seems like
something's bothering you.

CLAIRE
I'm fine.

FRANK
Claire, what's the matter?

Claire looks at Frank.

CLAIRE
I don't know if I want to go
through with it.

FRANK
What do you mean? I thought this
was what you wanted.

CLAIRE
It was. But I've been thinking.
What about John?

Frank pours the coffee into two cups.

FRANK
What about John?

CLAIRE
He doesn't want me to do this, you
know that.

FRANK
It's not his decision. We've
already talked about this.

CLAIRE
Yeah, but I don't want him to be
mad at me for the rest of his life.
And maybe he's right. Maybe I could
get better.

Frank sits down at the table.

FRANK
So what are you saying?

CLAIRE

I think I might just continue with the treatment.

FRANK

Claire, the treatment isn't working. It's been months. It's only getting worse.

CLAIRE

Yeah, but there's a small chance things could turn around.

FRANK

Yeah, a very small chance. It's not worth it. Not after everything you've already been through.

*

Frank takes a drink of coffee.

CLAIRE

I know. But I think I should continue with the treatment. For John's sake.

FRANK

Claire, I know how much you want this. You need to do you YOU want, not what John wants. He'll understand eventually.

*

*

*

CLAIRE

Frank, he's our son. I'm not going to take those pills unless he's okay with it.

*

Frank takes a long pause. He looks down at the table.

FRANK

Let's just wait and see. Maybe he'll come around by tonight.

*

CLAIRE

Well if he doesn't. I'll just have to tell the doctors that I'm canceling.

FRANK

Are you sure you want to do that?

*

*

CLAIRE

Frank, I'm telling you. If he doesn't want me to, I'm not going to. It's that simple.

*

*

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*

FRANK
I don't know, Claire.

*

The doorbell rings.

FRANK (CONT'D)
I'll get it.

CUT TO:

INT. FOYER - DAY

Frank looks through the door hole to see who it is. Claire's sister MARION, 65, stands outside the door holding a big cardboard box.

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Frank slowly opens the door.

FRANK
Oh, Marion. You're early...

Frank looks at his watch. It's noon.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Really early.

MARION
Yeah I know. But I just had to get over here as soon as I could.

FRANK
Alright, come on in.

Marion pushes by Frank and heads straight for the kitchen, where Claire is still sitting.

*

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

MARION
Hi, honey. How are you?

Claire turns around and sees Marion.

CLAIRE
Oh hi Marion. Why so early?

MARION
Well I just want to spend as much time with my sister as I possibly can, that's all.

Marion sets the huge box down on the kitchen table and gives Claire an uncomfortably long hug.

CLAIRE

Okay, Marion. I think that's good.

MARION

Oh, sorry hun. I just have a hard time letting go, if you know what I mean.

CLAIRE

It's alright. So what's in the box?

MARION

Just some old stuff I thought we could go through. A trip down memory lane.

CLAIRE

Oh, that sounds like fun. *

Claire gets up and they make their way into the living room. *

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Claire and Marion rifle through the old photos and keepsakes. Claire pulls out her and Marion's senior pictures from high school. *

CLAIRE

Oh wow. Look at these.

MARION

What is it, let me see.

Marion grabs the photos.

MARION (CONT'D)

Oh dear god. What were we wearing?

CLAIRE

Look at our hair.

MARION

I looked hideous. Who let me leave the house like that?

CLAIRE

I don't know what we were thinking.

MARION

Who knows. It was the sixties.

Claire and Marion continue to dig through the box. Marion pulls out a family photo from when she and Claire were kids.

She looks at it for a while. Her eyes start to water.

MARION (CONT'D)

I'm gonna miss you, Claire.

Claire doesn't say anything.

MARION (CONT'D)

Are you sure you want to go through with this?

CLAIRE

Not really.

Marion starts to put all the photos back in the box.

MARION

So what are you gonna do?

CLAIRE

I don't know.

MARION

Well you know how I feel. But I'll support you either way.

CLAIRE

Are you sure you'll be okay.

MARION

Claire, don't worry about me, I'll be fine. So is Johnny finally okay with it?

Claire pauses for a minute.

CLAIRE

Not exactly.

CUT TO:

INT. FOYER - DAY

The front door slams open. JOHN, 33, bursts in. He rushes past his mom and aunt without even noticing them.

CUT TO:

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INT. HALLWAY - DAY

*

Frank hears the noise and comes to see what it is. He runs into John, who's moving swiftly down the hall.

FRANK
What are you doing?

JOHN
Where are they?

FRANK
Where are what?

JOHN
The pills.

Frank hurries to the master bedroom. John follows him.

FRANK
What do you think you're gonna do with them?

JOHN
I'm getting rid of them.

CUT TO:

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INT. BEDROOM - DAY

*

Frank runs into the bedroom and grabs the pill bottle off the nightstand.

JOHN
Give them to me.

FRANK
You're not getting them.

JOHN
Give me the damn pills.

FRANK
John, you're acting ridiculous. You need to calm down.

JOHN
I will once you give me the damn pills.

John repeatedly tries to grab the bottle from his dad. Marion comes down the hall to see what's going on.

MARION

Johnny, what on earth are you doing?

John looks up and sees his aunt. He immediately stops fighting for the pill bottle.

JOHN

Oh. Hi Aunt Marion.

MARION

Hi Johnny. Now let's all settle down and come into the living room to talk.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Marion, Frank, and John all come into the living room where Claire is sitting.

MARION

So let's talk this out, shall we?

FRANK

I don't know what's gotten into you, John.

JOHN

Why, because I'm trying to keep mom from killing herself?

FRANK

Don't start with that. You know that's not what this is.

JOHN

What is it then?

Claire and Marion sit in silence while the other two continue to argue.

FRANK

John, enough. I'm done trying to explain it to you.

JOHN

Then I'm done trying to understand it.

FRANK

What are you talking about? You haven't made an effort to understand this from the very beginning.

JOHN

It's pretty hard to understand something that doesn't make any sense.

FRANK

The doctors are all in support of this. They said it's the best option.

*

JOHN

They also said there's a chance she could still get better with the treatment.

*

FRANK

John, your mother has stage 4 cancer. Even if she continues the treatment, there's no guarantee she'll get better.

*

*

*

*

*

JOHN

But there's still a chance.

*

*

Claire looks uncomfortable.

*

FRANK

John, if she doesn't take the pill, she'll die a slow, painful death. Do you really want to see your mother suffer any more than she already has?

*

*

*

*

JOHN

No, but I also don't want her to die, okay?

FRANK

She's going to die either way, John.

*

JOHN

You don't know that!

Claire gets out of her chair.

*

CLAIRE
That's it! I can't take this
anymore.

*
*
*

FRANK
Claire, where are you going?

CLAIRE
I'm not going through with it. I'm
calling the doctors.

FRANK
Claire, wait.

CLAIRE
I already told you, Frank. If John
doesn't want me to do it, I'm not
going to.

Claire goes out to the kitchen.

FRANK
I hope you're happy, John.

Frank follows Claire to the kitchen. Marion looks over at
John.

MARION
So I guess it's just you and me,
Johnny.

John doesn't respond. Marion notices her box sitting on the
floor. She stares at it for a while.

*

Marion brings the box over to John and sits down next to him.
She pulls out a stack of photos.

*

She shows him a picture of Claire holding John as a newborn
at the hospital.

She shows him another picture of the two of them at his high
school graduation. She shows him a third picture of them at
his college graduation.

*
*

John glances at them. He looks away.

*

MARION (CONT'D)
She's always been there for you,
hasn't she?

John nods his head.

MARION (CONT'D)

I'm just as upset as you are, John.
But at some point we just have to
let go.

JOHN

What if it's not time to let go?

MARION

John, your mom really wants to do
this. She's been through a lot. I
think we should support her
decision.

John looks down. He takes a deep breath. *

JOHN *

I'm a terrible son. *

MARION *

What are you talking about? You're
an excellent son. *

JOHN *

No, I'm not. *

MARION *

Honey, why do you think that? *

JOHN *

Ever since I found out she had
cancer I haven't been around very
much. *

MARION *

Why not? *

JOHN *

I don't know. I guess I was just
scared and thought if I didn't come
around for a while, the cancer
would go away and everything would
be fine. And it's not. *

MARION *

Well at least you're here now. *

JOHN *

I should have been there to support
her when she needed me. Now it's
too late. *

MARION

Honey, it's not too late. She still needs your support now. I think you should go in and talk to your parents.

JOHN

Yeah, I guess you're right.

John sighs. He gets up.

MARION

And don't get me too upset with your dad. He means well, he just wants what's best for your mom.

JOHN

I know.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

John walks into the kitchen, where Claire and Frank are busy making phone calls to Claire's doctors.

JOHN

Guys, we need to talk.

Claire and Frank finish what they're doing and look up.

CLAIRE

What do you want to talk about?

JOHN

I've been pretty selfish lately. I should have been there for you more than I was. I'm sorry.

CLAIRE

It's alright, John.

JOHN

And I'm sorry I haven't been more supportive of your decision. I just want to let you know that I support you 100 percent.

CLAIRE

You don't have to do that. I've already made up my mind, and I'm not going through with it.

JOHN
 Mom, don't change your mind just
 because of me. I'm okay with
 whatever you decide to do.

CLAIRE
 Are you sure?

JOHN
 Positive.

Claire's face lights up.

CLAIRE
 Thanks, John.

JOHN
 No problem.

Claire gives John a hug.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 And Dad, sorry that I went a little
 overboard earlier.

FRANK
 That's alright, John. I didn't mean
 to sound so harsh. I was just
 trying to help you understand. *

JOHN
 I know. *

After listening to the entire conversation from the other
 room, Marion finally comes into the kitchen.

MARION
 Well it's good to see everything's
 better between you three.

CLAIRE
 Yes, it is.

Marion notices the PILL BOTTLE on the table. Her eyes once
 again begin to water. *

MARION
 How much longer do we have, Claire? *

Claire looks at the clock.

CLAIRE
 Well I'm supposed to take the pills
 later in the evening... *

She picks up the pill bottle and looks at it for a moment. *

But you know what? I'll do it
tomorrow, what's one more night? *

She sets the bottle back down on the table. *

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Claire, Frank, John, and Marion spend the rest of the evening looking through Marion's box of mementos and enjoying their final hours together.

FADE OUT.