

Family

(c)

INT. HOSPITAL - ELEVATOR - NIGHT

A small, almost suffocating space.

HOWARD (35), balding and exhausted from life, stands next to a bored looking Laurice (30). Both passively stare at the closed elevator doors.

The only sound in an otherwise quiet elevator comes from JESSIE (17) focused on her cell phone, her thumbs tapping furiously at the buttons.

With a single DING the elevator stops and a second later the doors noisily open, the women sluggishly follow Howard's quick pace into --

INT. RECEPTION ROOM - SAME

Large but dimly lit.

A lone RECEPTIONIST sits behind a large curved desk. The room is dead empty of people.

JESSIE

I'll see you when you guys get out.

LAURA

Pardon me? No, you can --

JESSIE

It's depressing and I'd rather not be here, not doing it.

Jessie heads for the nearest chair but a tug from her mother interrupts her.

LAURA

We are here to visit your brother, all of us and that is what we are going to do.

JESSIE

Don't call him my brother, he isn't my brother.

LAURA

Well whatever you want to call him you are going to go say hello.

Howard reaches the desk and greets the Receptionist with a small smile, she returns a courtesy grin -- something is wrong.

RECEPTIONIST
You can go right in mister Gueller.

HOWARD
Alright.

He turns and motions for the women to follow.

The Receptionist gets on the P.A.

RECEPTIONIST
(into P.A)
Doctor Markus to the front desk,
doctor Markus to the front desk.

INT. HOSPITAL - JAKE'S ROOM - SAME

A typical hospital room.

JAKE (10) Small, frail. His pale bald head shows blackened veins, the reaction to chemotherapy.

A small plastic hose connects him to a oxygen cylinder close by his bed.

Howard, seated right next to his bed, talks excitedly with him.

The women are seated at the end of the bed, Laura gives off small almost meaningless grins as Jake looks over to her. Jessie's focus is yet again on her phone.

A soft tap on the door.

A tall and somber looking DOCTOR MARKUS enters.

DOCTOR MARKUS
Good evening everybody.
(to Howard)
Can we speak outside mister
Gueller?

HOWARD
Yeah, of course.

Howard gets up and follows Doctor Markus outside.

LAURA
Sit tight, I'll be right back.

JESSIE
Whatever.

Laura follows Howard outside, Jessie continues mashing away at the button. After a while she gazes up, Jake is watching her.

JESSIE
Don't stare it's creepy, you look like an alien.

JAKE
You want to play a game with me.

JESSIE
I'm busy.

Jake snatches the board game Scrabble from a nearby table. he shakes the box, the pieces inside rattle. Jessie looks up again.

JESSIE
Board games....really?

JAKE
Come on it's fun, I was laying it all day with the staff.

JESSIE
Your dad with probably play it with you, why not what for him?

INT. RECEPTION ROOM - SAME

Doctor Markus stands in front of a distressed Howard and Laura.

DOCTOR MARKUS
I'm so sorry, sometimes these treatments just don't have enough effect.

HOWARD
How long does he have?

DOCTOR MARKUS
Could be a year, could be five. I can't give an --

HOWARD
Can we increase the chemo?

DOCTOR MARKUS
He is already at the limit, anymore and it may do more harm than good. Could even drastically shorten his life span.

HOWARD

Oh god.

DOCTOR MARKUS

But if we continue with the current treatment, it may also give him a fighting chance. As far as we know the cancer hasn't spread at all, it's possible for him to recover, but it won't be cheap.

Howard breaks down crying, Laura rubs his back affectionately.

LAURA

I think we should choose a different path doctor.

HOWARD

No, we are going to keep the treatment now, as long as it takes.

LAURA

But five years? Babe, we can barely afford to keep up with the bills even now and Jessie is about university age now. What about her?

HOWARD

We aren't giving up on my son, we will manage.

Howard moved back towards the room, dries his eyes.

LAURA

I hate it too but we need to think realistically here.

Howard flashes her a murderous glare before entering Jake's room.

INT. HOSPITAL - JAKE'S ROOM - SAME

Jake has the game set up on his bed, he looks up excitedly as Howard walks in.

JAKE

Can we play a game dad?

A sad smile appears on Howard's face. Laura enters behind him.

HOWARD

I think we all can play a game,
might do us some good.

JESSIE

I'm good here thanks.

Laura snatches the phone from her hands.

JESSIE

Mom, what the hell!

LAURA

We are *all* going to play.

INT. HOSPITAL - JAKE'S ROOM - LATER

Everyone is seated around Jake's bed, the scrabble board has a few words already slept on it.

JAKE

Eight points for me, your turn
Jessie.

Jessie looks at her pieces with little interest.

JESSIE

Got nothing again...pass.

LAURA

Come on Jessie, play the game.

JAKE

You haven't put down anything!

JESSIE

Cause I don't want to, this game is
stupid.

JAKE

I think it's because you can't
spell.

Howard chuckles drawing a disapproving look from Laura.

JESSIE

Oh ya? how about this?
(placing pieces down)
Death -- it's what you look like.
How many points is that?

LAURA
Jessie!

HOWARD
You pick those up and do something
else!

JESSIE
What? It's a word isn't it?

JAKE
It's alright, I'll count that.

HOWARD
No it's not alright, we aren't
counting that one.

LAURA
If Jake is okay with it then I
think it should be counted

HOWARD
are you kidding me?

LAURA
It is a word and even though it's
in poor taste I think it should
count.
(looks at board)
That would be eight points.

Howard shakes his head.

JAKE
Dad, you turn.

Howard scans his pieces and snatches up a few.

HOWARD
How about this one then
(placing pieces down)
Bitch.

LAURA
No, you take that off right now!

Jessie stands up angrily, teary eyed she walks out.

JESSIE
Fuck you, I'm done playing this
stupid game!

HOWARD
(mockingly)
Why, it's a word isn't it?

LAURA
You know damn well why!

HOWARD
What, it's a name for female dog,
not my fault it conveniently
describes your daughter as well.

Laura stands up angrily and grabs a few scrabble pieces already on the board and spells out "fucked"

LAURA
There!...conveniently describes not
only Jessie's future but our
financial state as well....fucked!

Now it's Howard's turn to stand.

HOWARD
Is this where you want to have this
conversation....here!

JAKE
Can we just play the game?

LAURA
I want my daughter to have an
education, to get a good job!

HOWARD
I want my son to have the same!

LAURA
You have taken every dollar we have
earned and spent it selfishly on
your son, all of it. My daughter
has got nothing from you, barely
even any love because you were too
focused on Jake, why do you neglect
the only one that has a future!

A sharp gasp, Laura's hands go straight to her mouth, eyes open wide. she can't believe what she said.

Howard is frozen in a state between shock and rage.

A long silence

JAKE

If I can't have a future, then can
I at least have this?

Both Howard and Laura both look at Jake. On the scrabble board before him he places down the work "family" spreading across each of the three previous words.

The anger melts from Howard, Laura begins to tear up.

JAKE

Plus...that's game.

The End.