

Once Before Dying

by

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INT. ASSISTED LIVING SUITE - NIGHT

Framed photos of a life long lived - family, and vacation, and graduations - rattle on a nightstand under the glow of street lights. Soft, hoarse, moans hang in the air.

A time weathered hand lands hard on the laminate wood clawing for mercy. Then... climax, three taps, a surrender.

FLORENCE
(Barely able to get the words out)
Okay, okay, okay.

BILLIE (mid 70s), with a short cut, a gold tooth, and timeless swag, emerges from between FLORENCE's (mid 70s) legs. As Billie goes in for a kiss she notices Florence clutching her chest.

BILLIE
Good, huh?

Florence taps her chest frantically, gasping for air and growing panicked. Billie quickly understands this is something more and hops off the bed.

INT. NURSE'S STATION - NIGHT

A young, male, NIGHT NURSE, dozes off at his post.

Billie's cane strikes the floor with purpose as she hustles her way to the desk. Billie hits the desk, jolting the Night Nurse out of his sleep.

BILLIE
Something's wrong with Florence!

NIGHT NURSE
Huh?

BILLIE
She can't breathe or something, I don't know!

The Night Nurse jumps into action.

INT. ASISTED LIVING SUITE - NIGHT

Florence lay unresponsive on her bed. The Night Nurse rushes to her side and immediately begins CPR.

Nervous, Billie paces. She stops at the window, looking out on the the street, she prays, she begs. The street light flickering above her goes out.

Billie rests her forehead against the window.

BILLIE

*Please, God. I don't ask for much,
just give us a little more time.*

INT. ASSISTED LIVING SUITE - DAY

The beeps of a heart monitor fill the moderately sized room.

Florence sleeps with Billie by her side stroking her hand, and singing Stevie Wonder's "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing."

EXT. HALLWAY, ASSISTED LIVING FACILITY - DAY

DOCTOR ANTHONY (40s) walks down the hallway and stops outside of Florence & Billie's room. He drops the chart as he looks through the papers.

INT. ASISTED LIVING SUITE - DAY

Hearing the clipboard drop outside of their room, Billie gets up and hops in bed acting like she's reading.

Dr. Anthony enters, close the curtain between the two beds, and wakes Florence up.

DR. ANTHONY

Mrs. Reeves. So sorry to wake you. I understand there was an incident last night. Can you tell me... were you engaged in any sort of activity at the time of the incident?

FLORENCE

In the middle of the night? What would I be doing.

DR. ANTHONY

We know about some of the residents'... extracurriculars.

FLORENCE

I don't know anything about that.
I'm married.

DR. ANTHONY

Mmm. Well, here's the situation. Whatever has been going on at night, has been taxing on your heart causing your pacemaker to work overtime. You've almost fully depleted the battery. You're aware that your heart is too weak for us to put another one in.

FLORENCE

I am.... Which is why I elected not be resuscitated.

DR. ANTHONY

Our apologies. Donny's new, and we've reprimanded him accordingly. Maybe a little extra time could be a good thing... depending on how you look at it...

(Florence simple stares at him disinterested in the life lesson)

Alrighty then... We're going to have to adjust your care under these new circumstances. We'll be serving your meals in room and limiting all physical activity so that you don't over exert yourself.

FLORENCE

(Bitter)

Sounds grand.

DR. ANTHONY

We can't tell you how much time you have left. But so that you have a firm understanding of the risks, a walk around the block could expend what little battery you have left. Questions?

FLORENCE

No.

DR. ANTHONY

Wonderful.

Dr. Anthony pauses to leave, then turns back.

DR. ANTHONY

Oh, we've notified your family of the incident and they should be coming to check on you.

He exits as soon as the door clicks closed, the partition is swung open by Billie's cane. They regard each other.

BILLIE

Did you know that making love to me was killing you?

Florence looks away, shrugs.

FLORENCE

The women in my family are known to have weak hearts.

BILLIE

You could have told me. It's *me*.

Tears fall from Florence's eyes against her will.

FLORENCE

There's so many things I haven't said. So many things I haven't done. And I just figured, it'd be better to get to the part where life resets and I can start over. Try again. Maybe I'll get to a lifetime where I can live out loud.

BILLIE

Maybe... but then you won't be aware of how far you've come. How courageous you are.

(Beat)

What's one thing you want to do? Pick one. One thing is enough. One thing is everything.

Florence ponders the for a moment.

FLORENCE

I want to go the beach, dip my feet in the water and hold hands with you.

BILLIE

Done.

FLORENCE

But you heard-

BILLIE

I said done. I'm taking my lady out. Don't worry about the rest... just think about what you want to wear.

A quick knock at the door and CASSY (mid 40s) and DESMOND (early 80s), Florence's daughter and husband file in. They immediately position themselves between Florence & Billie. She takes some steps back, pushed out.

Cassy pulls the curtain closed. Billie stares as the beige curtain as it sways slightly with Cassy launching into her inquiries and concerns.

INT. HALLWAY, ASSISTED LIVING FACILITY - DAY

A YOUNG WOMAN (20s) pulls a tray from the push cart and enters a room.

Cane first, Billie steps into the hall as the Young Woman re-emerges and continues down the hallway, bopping to tunes playing in her AirPods.

Billie hustles to catch up to the Young Woman. She calls out to her, but she's in her own world. Then she stops at the next room and repeats the same routine from before.

Billie is halfway the cart when a tray of food flies out of the room, trailed by the Young Woman now in a mild fury.

YOUNG WOMAN

That ain't no problem! Just don't go calling the nurses when you get hungry...

Cursing under her breath the Young Woman cleans up the smattering of food on the floor.

Billie taps the Young Woman's shoulder. She yelps, punctuating it with a curse beneath her breath.

BILLIE

My apologies, youngin'. Didn't mean to scare you. Just need a little help is all.

YOUNG WOMAN

The nurses desk is at the opposite end of the hall.

BILLIE
I'm aware. But I believe you're
better suited to help me out.

Billie smiles flashing her golds. The Young Woman sighs.

YOUNG WOMAN
What?

BILLIE
Can you show me how to get
(g)Uber?

YOUNG WOMAN
Uber.

BILLIE
Call it whatever you want.

YOUNG WOMAN
Hand me your phone.

The Young Woman holds out her hand. Billie digs deep in her pockets and pulls out a flip phone, dropping it in the Young Woman's hands. The Young Woman bursts out laughing.

YOUNG WOMAN
You can't get Uber on this.

INT. ASSISTED LIVING SUITE - DAY

Desmond stands at the window watching the people below.

DESMOND
That's a big ole woman, aint it?

FLORENCE
Stand up straight, and then you
can't talk.

DESMOND
Easy now.

Desmond, bent at a 45 degree angle, makes his way to the chair at Florence's bedside and plops down.

At Florence's other side Cassy uncovers the day's lunch.

CASSY
Ma, why don't you eat a little
something?

FLORENCE

No thanks.

CASSY

You got to.

FLORENCE

Last I checked I st'mill grown,
and I've no intention to eat that
slop.

CASSY

Just a few bites.

Cassy loads up a forkful and extends it to Florence's mouth. Florence stares in defiance. Cassy relents tossing the fork down.

CASSY

Well....

(beat)

I could run out get you something.
What do you want?

FLORENCE

You remember that little Italian
place? Oh I would love some of
that pasta with the.. uhhh...
uhhh...

CASSY

The short rib pasta?

FLORENCE

That's it! That's the one.

Cassy throws her purse on her shoulder.

FLORENCE

Take your father with you.

Cassy glances to Desmond nodding off in the chair.

CASSY

And disturb his sleep? I couldn't.

Desmond's snoring crescendos.

FLORENCE

But what if his sleep is
disturbing me??

The door closes behind Cassy.

INT. COMMON ROOM - DAY

With the yellow pages opened up in front of her, Billie dials the number for a taxi.

As she puts the phone to her ear, she catches sight of Cassy heading out the double doors.

INT. ASSISTED LIVING SUITE - DAY

Billie peeks behind the curtain separating her side of the room from Florence's. The TV plays loudly, an attempt to cover Desmond's thunderous snores.

Florence perks up. Silently Billie holds up two dresses. Florence pushes herself out of bed.

Standing, rather unsteadily, in front of her dresser, Florence passes clothes to Billie.

With a sliver of privacy on the other side of the curtain, Billie dresses Florence in her outfit.

INT. HALLWAY, ASSISTED LIVING SUITE - DAY

Florence braces herself against Billie as they walk down the hallway.

A NURSE exits a patient's room, almost running into them.

NURSE

What are you doing up and about
Mrs. Reeves? You're on bedrest.

Without stopping to think, the Nurse grabs a wheel chair that's been abandoned in the hallway and rolls it up behind Florence.

FLORENCE

Oh, I'm okay. I just wanted to
stretch my legs a bit.

NURSE

Have a seat.
(beat)
Doctor's orders.

The Nurse pushes the wheelchair against the back of Florence's knees, they fold, and she lands in the chair.

BILLIE

Hey, easy now.

NURSE

Relax, Mr. Ma'am. I got it.

The Nurse pushes off, rolling Florence to the common room.

INT. COMMON ROOM, ASSISTED LIVING FACILITY - DAY

Florence sits parked next to a large window with Billie beside her. Billie turns her wrist over, checking her watch. She groans, looks to the nurse's station.

The Nurse is busy talking to a FAMILY MEMBER of another resident.

Florence reaches for Billie's hand, grabbing her attention.

FLORENCE

It's okay... forget about it.

The sound of a honking horn slips under the window. Billie leans in a finds a taxi waiting down below.

Billie reaches her foot out and unlocks the wheels on Florence's chair. She pulls her closer and grabs the handles, ready.

Desmond takes baby steps as the hallway spits him out into the common room on the opposite side of Florence and Billie.

Finally, what Billie's been waiting for, the nurse turns her back.

INT. ELEVATOR AREA, ASSISTED LIVING FACILITY - DAY

Florence giggles as Billie pushes her furiously down the hall. She's almost catching wind in her hair.

Billie's limp is more pronounced with her speed. And her jump, hop, run, causes her phone to fall from her pocket.

INT. ELEVATOR, ASSISTED LIVING FACILITY - DAY

Billie turns Florence's wheel chair around to face front in the elevator.

Florence's eyes meet Desmonds at the end of the hall. He's approaching fast as he can, with no real hope to catch up.

Billie unhooks her cane from her arm and presses "L" with it.

Desmond stops and watches as the doors close between himself and the two women.

EXT. ASSISTED LIVING FACILITY - DAY

The taxi pulls off as Billie and Florence emerge onto the sidewalk.

Billie runs after the taxi.

BILLIE

Hey! HEY! We're right here! Don't leave. We're here!

Billie slows to a stop, out of breath. Florence foot walks the wheel chair toward her.

FLORENCE

Let's just go back upstairs.

BILLIE

Will you stop trying to give up?
This ain't no problem. I'll just call us another one.

Billie reaches into her pocket, finding it empty. She pats her body frantically. Florence looks around, averting her gaze from Billie's obvious frustration.

FLORENCE

When was the last time you been on the train?

INT. A TRAIN - DAY

TRAIN CONDUCTOR (V.O.)

Stand clear of the closing doors please.

Though the brakes are on, Florence's wheel chair does a little dance with the movement of the train as she sits knee to knee with Billie.

The cityscape passes behind them as the train barrels down the tracks.

Billie and Florence watch the PERFORMERS as they turn the train car into a Cirque Du Soleil stage during the time it takes to get from one stop to another.

As Billie is engulfed in the view outside the window, Florence slides her fingers between Billie's.

Billie's eye's meet Florences. Florence smiles, blushing. Billie closes her hand tighter around Florence's and shoots her a wink.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

The subway station elevators groan and screech as they open. Florence pushes Billie onto the side walk.

EXT. BOARDWALK - DAY

Billie pushes Florence down the boardwalk. The sun is as high as it is oppressive. People are out in full force enjoying the last of summer.

Florence grabs the wheel of her chair, bringing them to a stop.

BILLIE

What's the matter?

Florence digs through the purse on her lap.

FLORENCE

I'd love a frankfurter with some relish and onions and some chili fries.

Florence pulls a twenty out of her wallet and extends it toward Billie.

Billie closes Florence's hand over her offering.

BILLIE

Maybe you don't know how this goes... But when you're out... with me? You don't even reach for your wallet.

Billie pushes Florence toward a bench, kicks the brake on, and leans in for a kiss. Florence pulls away instinctively. Billie hangs there for a moment. Hurt.

The wind picks up Florence's curls and tosses them about as she sits, people watching.

Billie returns with her arms full. She places the food onto Florence's lap and sits on the bench.

FLORENCE

I'm sorry-

BILLIE
Don't...

They "cheers," Billie touching her corndog to Florence's hotdog. As they bust down on their food a YOUNG WOMAN passes them pulling a cooler.

YOUNG WOMAN
NUTCRACKERS! NUTCRACKERS!

BILLIE
How much?

YOUNG WOMAN
\$5.

Billie hands over \$10.

BILLIE
Dealers choice. Give me the best you got.

The Young woman reaches in the cooler and pulls out two plastic bottles filled with a green elixir the uninitiated would mistake as juice.

Billie and Florence sip their nutcrackers.

FLORENCE
Whew. That's *LIQQA*.

Billie nods as she drains the bottle, unfazed.

FLORENCE
You know what we should do?

EXT. FERRIS WHEEL, LUNA PARK - DAY

Standing in line at the Ferris wheel, Billie and Florence are next up. The ride comes to a stop and the crowd files off.

Billie leans on her cane as she pulls Florence out of her seat with the other hand.

The security bar clicks in place in front of them.

Florence rests her chin on Billie's shoulder as the ride takes them up in the air, and looks out onto the ocean.

FLORENCE
I forgot how beautiful the world is.

BILLIE

How? You ain't shy with the
mirror.

Florence looks up at Billie, squinting in silent protest. Billie flashes a smile. Florence raises her mouth to Billie's, hesitates. After a sideways glance she leans in, and they kiss. A first kiss of sorts.

EXT. LUNA PARK - DAY

Billie pushes Florence through the park. Again, they come to an abrupt stop. Florence has taken the wheel.

Screams of riders on the Cyclone roller coaster dance through the air. Florence starts turning her wheelchair toward the ride.

Billie grabs the hands and pulls her back.

BILLIE

No.

FLORENCE

Oh, come on.

BILLIE

It could kill you.

Florence stares....and? An almost imperceptible shrug.

BILLIE

This is our first real date, you
ready for it to be over so soon?

(beat)

Make a woman think she ain't
treating you right.

FLORENCE

Hush.

BILLIE

I must be very out of practice.
You'd rather kick the bucket than
spend a few more hours out with
me.

Florence rolls her chair forward a bit, nudging Billie off balance.

FLORENCE

Quit it. You win.

(MORE)

FLORENCE (CONT'D)
(beat)
Take me to the water.

EXT. BEACH, CONEY ISLAND - SUNSET

The sky is a smattering of orange and purple hues.

The large wheels of the wheelchair sink into the sand. Billie leans onto the handles pushing with all her might. The wheels slowly shift forward a bit, before rolling back into the place. Stuck.

BILLIE
Just try and scooch with your
feet. On three.

Billie wraps her fingers around the handles, grasping tightly.

BILLIE
One... two... three

Florence's feet shuffle in the sand. Billie pushes. The wheels roll one and a half times and their stuck again. Billie pauses, out of breath. She wipes the sweat off her brow, preparing to go again.

BILLIE
Ready?

FLORENCE
No... just... stop.

Florence pushes herself up and out of the wheelchair. She takes a few steps. Billie grabs her hand, but whatever she thought to say has escaped.

FLORENCE
It's okay.

BILLIE
Take my cane at least.

In response, Florence takes Billie's hand and leads them toward the shore.

During the walk, Florence seems to lean more and more heavily onto Billie. Until at three quarters of the way through, she stumbles and collapses.

Billie hoists Florence back up.

At the shore, the water washes over their feet, and Billie's cane. Florence holds her chest. Full clothed, she lowers herself into the water, in a seated position.

Billie takes a seat behind her, acting as a support. Florence takes Billie's arms and crosses them around her chest. She closes her eyes, inhaling.

FLORENCE

Can't believe I've robbed myself of so many things in life behind being afraid. So convinced I couldn't have what I want, so I took what I could get instead. And yet, it's so simple.

BILLIE

What is?

FLORENCE

Having a life worth living. Sitting at the beach, watching the sunset with someone you... love.

BILLIE

(Teasing)

Love?? Who do you love?

FLORENCE

Billie...?

BILLIE

Hmm?

FLORENCE

Thank y-

Florence's grip on Billie's arm goes slack with her final exhale.

Billie's eyes well up with tears. She holds Florence tighter. Kisses her.

BILLIE

(Whispers)

I love you too.

The waves continue to lap at their feet. The sun dips below the horizon.

Wet and silently weeping, Billie holds steadfast to Florence, even in the growing darkness.

FADE TO BLACK.