

GERDIE

by

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BETH (7) sits on a couch that's entirely too large. She cradles a SMALL FISHBOWL. Swimming inside, a GOLDFISH.

BETH
Gerdie?

The goldfish turns in its bowl, faces Beth. It SPEAKS.

GERDIE
Yes, Beth?

BETH
I changed my mind. I'm not going to ask her.

GERDIE
You have to.

BETH
But I'm afraid.

GERDIE
Of what?

DAD (O.S.)
Beth?

Beth glances up to see her DAD (mid 30's).

DAD
She's ready.

Beth glances down at Gerdie. With a grown-up watching, she's just a normal goldfish.

Beth secures Gerdie's bowl with both hands, wiggles off of the couch. She follows her dad down the hall.

Beth's MOM (mid 30's) sits in her bed, leaning against the headboard. She's thin, gaunt. Dark circles frame her eyes.

A KNOCK at her door.

It takes considerable effort, but she turns, sees Beth. She pours her remaining energy into a smile.

(CONTINUED)

MOM
Beth, baby-

Her voice cracks. She reaches her arms out for her daughter.

Beth sets Gerdie's bowl on the bedside table, climbs into her mom's bed, gives her a HUGE hug.

MOM
How's school?

Beth shrugs.

MOM
What about gymnastics? How's that
cartwheel coming along?

Beth glances at Gerdie. The fish twirls a fin, signaling Beth to go ahead.

BETH
Mommy? When are you coming home?

Beth's mom exchanges a look with her dad. Heartbreak. What do they tell their little girl?

MOM
I don't know, baby. But we're here
now, together.

BETH
I miss you.

MOM
(fighting back tears)
What do you miss most? My pancakes,
I bet.

BETH
I miss you singing me to sleep.

Beth's mom cradles her baby girl in her arms. She rocks back and forth as she begins to sing a LULLABY.

3 EXT. HOSPICE - NIGHT

3

The sound of the lullaby floats into the night.

Beth's dad walks toward his car, carrying Beth in one arm and Gerdie's bowl in the other.

FADE TO:

4

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

4

Beth appears in the kitchen in footie pajamas, her hair mussed. She's carrying Gerdie's bowl.

Beth sets Gerdie on the table, climbs into a chair.

DAD

Morning, sweetheart.

Beth makes a sleepy noise in greeting. Her dad brings a plate to the table. TWO PANCAKES, brown and crispy.

Beth makes a face. Her dad pretends not to notice, hides his disappointment. He turns to wash his hands in the sink.

Beth whispers to Gerdie.

BETH

They don't look very tasty.

GERDIE

He's trying.

BETH

Mommy's are better.

GERDIE

You're going to need to start doing big girl things, Beth. Like eating your daddy's pancakes without making that face.

BETH

Why?

GERDIE

Because you're growing up.

The phone RINGS. Beth's dad freezes. He answers the phone with a hesitant reluctance.

Without uttering a word, he hangs up. He shoulders SHUDDER as he begins to CRY.

Beth exchanges a look with Gerdie.

5 INT. HOSPICE - WAITING AREA - DAY

5

Beth sits again on the too-big couch, Gerdie in her lap.

She watches the activity down the hall. Outside her mommy's room, grown-ups hug each other, wipe away tears.

BETH

What's happening, Gerdie?

GERDIE

Your mommy's gone, Beth.

BETH

Gone?

GERDIE

This is part of growing up. It happens to everyone sooner or later. Someone they love dies.

BETH

But I don't want her to be gone.

Beth starts to cry.

GERDIE

It's okay to be sad, Beth. Your daddy is sad, too. Look.

Beth looks down the hall. Her daddy is hugging Beth's grandma. He's crying into her shoulder.

GERDIE

But you need to be a big girl now, and big girls don't talk to their goldfish.

BETH

I like talking to you.

GERDIE

Your daddy needs you, Beth. Your mommy needs you to take care of him. Will you do that? For her?

Beth bites her lip, wipes away tears. She nods.

6

INT. BETH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

6

Beth is wearing her jammies, ready for bed. She gets a pinch of fish food for Gerdie, drops it in the fishbowl on her nightstand.

Gerdie darts toward the food. Beth watches the fish expectantly, but Gerdie doesn't say anything.

DAD

Hop in, princess.

Beth climbs in bed. Her daddy tucks her in, kisses her forehead.

BETH

Daddy?

DAD

Yes?

BETH

Will you make me pancakes for breakfast?

Her dad smiles, nods, bites back tears. He gives Beth another kiss on the forehead.

DAD

Sleep tight.

He turns the light off as he leaves the room. Beth's nightlight illuminates Gerdie's fishbowl.

Beth looks at Gerdie one last time, but the fish shows no sign of intelligence. She's just a fish again.

Beth rolls over, her back to Gerdie. Alone, in the dark, Beth begins to cry.

Behind her, she hears the sound of her MOTHER'S LULLABY.

Beth turns to face Gerdie again. The fish swims in the center of her bowl, SINGING FOR BETH.

BETH

Thanks, Gerdie.

Beth closes her eyes and drifts to sleep.

FADE TO BLACK